

WOODLEIGH

OR,
THE LOVE CHASE



✧ AUTHOR OF "ONE AND TWENTY" ✧

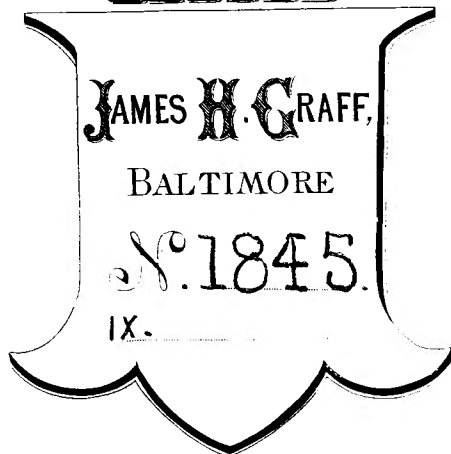
THE
SELECT LIBRARY OF FICTION.

PRICE TWO SHILLINGS PER VOLUME.

The best, cheapest, and most Popular NOVELS published, well printed in clear, readable type, on good paper, and at a low price.

VOL.

- 1 Ag
2 Hez
4 The
5 The
6 My
7 Oliv
10 Mar
11 The
12 Bacl
15 Ruth
17 Jack
18 Cha
20 The
22 Harr
23 Knig
25 Dodd
35.
27 The
28 Tom Burke. Double vol., 3s.
30 Davenport Dunn. Double vol., 3s.



Charles Lever.

ols.

Charles Lever.

Charles Lever.

Oliphant.

Mrs. Grey.

Trollope.

John Mills.

Double

Charles Lever.

Mrs. Gore.

Horwitt.

"ridesmaids."

Charles Lever.

Trollope.

Jewsbury.

ide

Trollope.

Trollope.

Charles Lever.

Charles Lever.

Ainsworth.

Lady Scott.

50 The Only Child

57 Mainstone's Housekeeper

Eliza Meteyard.

58 Master of the Hounds "Scrutator."

Charles Lever.

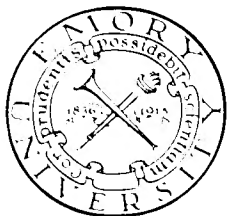
Charles Lever.

THE SELECT LIBRARY OF FICTION.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>VOL.</p> <p>59 Constance Herbert <i>Miss Jewsbury.</i></p> <p>60 Cardinal Pole <i>W. H. Ainsworth.</i></p> <p>61 Jealous Wife <i>Miss Pardoe.</i></p> <p>62 Rival Beauties <i>Miss Pardoe.</i></p> <p>63 Hunchback (The) <i>Victor Hugo.</i></p> <p>65 Lord Mayor of London
<i>W. H. Ainsworth.</i></p> <p>66 Elsie Venner <i>Oliver W. Holmes.</i></p> <p>67 Charlie Thornhill <i>Charles Clark.</i></p> <p>68 House of Elmore <i>F. W. Robinson.</i></p> <p>72 Country Gentleman "Scrutator."</p> <p>73 La Beata <i>T. Adolphus Trollope.</i></p> <p>74 Marietta <i>T. Adolphus Trollope.</i></p> <p>75 Barrington <i>Charles Lever.</i></p> <p>76 Beppo the Conscript
<i>T. Adolphus Trollope.</i></p> <p>77 Woman's Ransom <i>F. W. Robinson.</i></p> <p>78 Deep Waters <i>Anna H. Drury.</i></p> <p>79 Misrepresentation <i>Anna H. Drury.</i></p> <p>80 Tilbury Nogo <i>Whyte Melville.</i></p> <p>81 Queen of the Seas
<i>Captain Armstrong.</i></p> <p>82 He Would Be a Gentleman
<i>Samuel Lover.</i></p> <p>83 Mr. Stewart's Intentions
<i>F. W. Robinson.</i></p> <p>84 Mattie: a Stray
<i>Author of "Carry's Confessions."</i></p> <p>85 Doctor Thorne <i>Anthony Trollope.</i></p> <p>86 The Macdermots <i>Anthony Trollope.</i></p> <p>87 Lindisfarn Chase <i>Thomas A. Trollope.</i></p> <p>88 Rachel Ray <i>Anthony Trollope.</i></p> <p>89 Luttrell of Arran <i>Charles Lever.</i></p> <p>90 Giulio Malatesta <i>Thomas A. Trollope.</i></p> | <p>VOL.</p> <p>91 Wildflower <i>F. W. Robinson.</i></p> <p>92 Irish Stories <i>Samuel Lover.</i></p> <p>93 The Kellys <i>Anthony Trollope.</i></p> <p>94 Married Beneath Him
<i>Author of "Lost Sir Massingberd."</i></p> <p>95 Tales of all Countries
<i>Anthony Trollope.</i></p> <p>96 Castle Richmond <i>Anthony Trollope.</i></p> <p>97 Mount Sorel <i>Mrs. Marsh Caldwell.</i></p> <p>98 John Law, the Projector
<i>W. H. Ainsworth.</i></p> <p>99 Jack Brag <i>Theodore Hook.</i></p> <p>100 The Bertrams <i>Anthony Trollope.</i></p> <p>101 Faces for Fortunes
<i>Augustus Mayhew.</i></p> <p>102 Father Darcy <i>Mrs. Marsh Caldwell.</i></p> <p>103 Time the Avenger
<i>Mrs. Marsh Caldwell.</i></p> <p>104 Under the Spell <i>F. W. Robinson.</i></p> <p>105 Market Harborough
<i>Whyte Melville.</i></p> <p>106 Slaves of the Ring <i>F. W. Robinson.</i></p> <p>107 Alice Learmont, is.
<i>Author of "John Halifax."</i></p> <p>108 Clover Cottage, is.
<i>M. W. Savage.</i></p> <p>109 For a Pin, is. <i>De Saint Germain.</i></p> <p>110 Emilia Wyndham
<i>Mrs. Marsh Caldwell.</i></p> <p>111 One and Twenty <i>F. W. Robinson.</i></p> <p>112 Douglas' Vow
<i>Mrs. Edmund Jennings.</i></p> <p>113 Woodieigh
<i>Author of "Woman's Ransom."</i></p> <p>114 Theo Leigh <i>Annie Thomas.</i></p> |
|--|--|

SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS, AND AT THE RAILWAY STATIONS.

ROBERT W. WOODBRITT
LIBRARY



WOODLEIGH.

BY

FREDERICK WILLIAM ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF

"UNDER THE SPELL," "ONE AND TWENTY," "WILDFLOWER,"
"THE HOUSE OF ELMORE," "WOMAN'S RANSOM," &c., &c.

"The wynde is great upon the highest hylles,
The quiet lyfe is in the dale belowe;
Who treads on yse shall slide against their wills;
They want not cares that curious artes would knew.
Who lyves at ease and can content him so,
Is perfect wise, and sets us all to schole;
Who hates this lore may well be called a foole."

A MYSTHRE FOR MAGISTRATES, 1571.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1867.

[*The Right of Translation is reserved.*]

BOOK I.

THE BLACK SHEEP.

“Heyday ! this gentleman speaks like a country parson.”

HEYWOOD.

“*Snowb.*—What is this simpering? Where have you been?—what doing?”

“*Rosem.*—Been? Been to church, and been doing matrimony.”

DOUGLAS JERROLD.

WOODLEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

IS STRICTLY CONFINED TO PIOUS PEOPLE.

I WAS fast asleep in the corner of our little pew, and good Mr. Parnell was in the middle of his sermon, and my mother with her hands crossed in her lap—and her lap full of hymn-books, smelling salts, a pair of silver spectacles, and a white pocket-handkerchief—was listening attentively, when a tall high shouldered being clamped into chapel, looked round for a vacant seat, opened the door of our pew, took his place between me and my mother, and woke me up by fumbling under the seat for a place for his hat.

When he was comfortably settled and listening with his head on one side to the fifteenth part of the discourse, I, Heaven forgive me, more interested in the intruder than the preacher, took a deliberate survey of him. He was fifty years of age to begin with; he had a grey unornamental patch of whisker on each cheek, a wrinkled face, a good sized nose, large blood-shot eyes, five teeth in the top row and four in the bottom, all yellow;—*ergo*, he was not handsome.

He wore a long, ill-fitting black coat, his gloves were a doubtful pair, there was a darn on his waistcoat, and one of the knees of his trousers had been fine-drawn;—*ergo*, he was not rich.

He was very dusty; all the creases of his coat were full of dust; there was dust on his boots, on his waistcoat, on his gloves, on the grey patches of whisker, and in among the white-brown hair;—*ergo*, he was a traveller.

Who was he?—what was he?—what did he want in Nettleton?—what made him come to chapel at twenty minutes to eight o'clock?

I did not go to sleep again—I sat and watched him. My mother, immovable as Fate, retained her old position, kept her black eyes fixed on the Reverend Mr. Parnell, and did not even glance out of the corners of them at the stranger. Neighbours who were more inquisitive stared a little at him, and Mrs. Jinks, the pew opener, who sat on a stool in the aisle, squinted curiously from under her green shade.

It was summer time—the middle of summer, before the days “draw in,” or flowers think of fading; a bright evening when the rural town of Nettleton was in its Sunday best, and the green leaves of Nettleton woods were rustling skittishly and flirting with the zephyrs. A quiet Sabbath evening, the hour half-past seven, the chapel windows open, a wasp buzzing in and out and making impetuous bobs at Mrs. Jinks, the blue sky deepening, the red and golden glories in the west becoming fainter, Mr. Parnell ambling on leisurely to seventeenthly and lastly.

The dusty stranger paid Mr. Parnell every attention, was evidently as rapt a listener as my mother. Once, on Mr. Parnell's allusion to the text, he took my pocket-bible from the pew-rest, and with a rapidity that surprised me, skimmed over the leaves, found the verse, perused it, and replaced the book. Once he looked round the chapel—on an emergency it might have accommodated a hundred persons—and once he stood up, leaned into the next pew, and tapped an old gentleman on the head, Mr. Rigden, the saddler, and an influential member of the congregation, who was going to sleep as fast as he could manage it.

Mr. Parnell having concluded his sermon with a blessing and a pat on the cushion, there was an opening of pew doors, a shuffling of feet, and an end to the evening service.

My mother lingered to the last—it was a habit of hers which extremely annoyed me—and the third occupant of our pew lingered also, and leaned back in his seat with a weary expression of countenance.

He was the first to rise, though, and to murmur a “Thank you” to my mother—for the loan of the pew, I suppose—as he stepped into the narrow aisle, and walked briskly, not towards the entrance, but towards the minister's room at the end of the chapel.

When my mother and I were going down the hill to Nettle-ton—quaint old town that has known no change since the days of King Charles of blessed memory, that is nine miles from a railway station, and fifty miles from London—I ventured to disturb the current of ideas.

“I wonder who that chap is, now ? ”

“Chap, Robert ! ”

“That chap who came into our pew, mother—do you know him ? ”

“No, my dear. I never saw him before.”

“It was nobody who belonged to Nettleton, for—”

“Robert, dear, haven’t you anything better to talk about?—What was the text this evening ? ”

“The text did you say, mother ? ”

My mother *did* say text.

“Oh ! let me see. The thirteenth chapter—the thirteenth—no—the thirty-first chapter of Joshua, and the—”

“I don’t think there are thirty-one chapters in Joshua, Robert,” my mother observed quietly.

“There are in Jeremiah, then—it *was* Jeremiah, wasn’t it ? ”

“Yes,” sighed my mother.

“Of course it was. The thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah, and the—did you see his hat, mother ? ”

“My dear, it’s Sunday ! ”

My mother, though a true daughter of Eve, was never curious on Sundays. Moreover, my mother had a strict Methodist reverence for Sundays ; she abjured the world, its pomps and vanities on that day ; she went morning, afternoon and evening to the little chapel on the hill ; she had prayers before breakfast and prayers after supper, and cold meat for dinner always. With a pious mother I should have grown up more reverent and docile, but then she was a gentle, warm-hearted mother, too, and let me have more of my own way than was good for me. She was only severe on Sabbath days, and therefore I was always glad when Monday morning came, and I could go back to day-school, to my games in the playground and my races home again, over Nettleton Common.

Heigho ! this memory of the past may be very well in a story-book or sentimental ballad, very well for sober-minded, steady old gentlemen, whose jog-trot lives have had nothing remarkable in them, one way or another, who have had no trials or temptations to withstand or give way to, who have seen the sun rise on their fortunes and known not its setting,

but for Robert Woodleigh, one of the ne'er-do-wells, a rambler and a scapegrace—your humble servant, reader—it's not half so pleasant.

"My dear, it's Sunday!" There was no occasion to enlighten me on that point, I knew it well enough. The twenty or thirty shops comprising Nettleton town were tightly shut—with the exception of the Bell Inn, which my mother passed with upturned eyes—there were some grand people, the Squire of Nettleton and his lady, Lawyer Martin, his wife and children, Doctor Wisby and his grown-up daughters, coming down the High Street, where the church stood; there were no boys playing in the roads, and everyone was clean, and prim, and pious.

When we were at home in our front parlour, I was still conscious it was Sunday; there was my cricket-bat neglected in the corner, and there was Nettleton Common, where I always played, only a few yards off, and no one on it but two gipsy-boys, a flock of geese, and a meditative cow.

My mother opened the Bible at that chapter of Jeremiah which I had nearly forgotten, and pushed it across the table to me. I turned mine eyes from Nettleton Common—forbidden ground on that particular day—and read the Bible to my mother till the night set in, the stars came out, and my mother was afraid that I should ruin my eyes reading in the gloaming.

When the blind was drawn, and two lights set on the table—two lights always on a Sunday evening—my mother, leaving me to my Biblical researches, put on her silver spectacles—she had a weak sight for a woman of forty—and took up a book of Devotional Exercises, very profitable reading, but very dry, for even my mother succumbed and closed her eyes. I looked at the Family Bible, then at the ceiling, then at the candle, which I snuffed, then at the queer-shaped cabinet in the corner, then at the Bible again, the leaves of which I turned, till I came to the last—the fly-leaf, on which was an interesting chronicle that had been often spelt over.

There were half-a-dozen Robert Woodleighs' names on that page—Robert Woodleighs who were dead and buried, one of them my father, who had died six years ago, at the age of forty-five. The last name on the list, written in my father's best small-hand, referred to the unworthy chronicler of this history.

"Robert Woodleigh, born November 16th, 1827." So I was going on for fourteen in the year of grace one thousand eight

hundred and forty-one, getting "such a big boy," according to my mother, and "such a bad boy," according to my neighbours.

My mother was right, and my neighbours, at that time, were wrong. I had certainly a fair share of animal spirits, gave them play at unseasonable times, was not a particularly civil lad, in fact rather partial to the last word with my seniors, broke a few windows occasionally in the High Street,—which windows mother paid for, so there was no harm done,—fought with my neighbours' sons when they wanted to "bounce over me," fought twice with Squire Heberdeen's son, who was always interfering with the boys of the town, and sent him home the second time with a black eye he ought to have been proud of; but as for being a bad boy then, I solemnly deny it.

There were seven more names on the worn fly-leaf, names of near relations whom it was likely I should never see again.

"*James Woodleigh, born December 4th, 1790, married June 21st, 1820.*" He was my father's brother, and had been, once upon a time, my father's partner. The business prospered after Robert Woodleigh's decease; and had my father died five years later, it is possible that he would have left a rich widow behind him, instead of a middle-aged, pretty-faced relict, with exceedingly limited means.

Here followed a list of cousins—always the chief attraction for me on that page. I spelled the names over every Sunday evening when my mother, tired with three journeys to chapel and a strong dose of devotional exercises after them, was nodding in her chair. These were my imaginary histories that set me brooding many an hour, and conjuring up a series of fancy portraits.

Caroline Woodleigh, born Jan. 2nd, 1822.

Richard Woodleigh, born Mar. 15th, 1823.

Upton Woodleigh, born May 4th, 1826.

Constance Woodleigh, born Feb. 28th, 1828.

Mary Woodleigh, born Dec. 23rd, 1834.

John Woodleigh, born Dec. 23rd, 1834.

This completed the list—my father died in eighteen hundred and thirty-five, and no more was known of his kinsmen. James Woodleigh went up in the world, and Robert Woodleigh's widow went down; one went to the east and the other to the west; one stayed in London, the other in Nettleton; there was an end to all correspondence—what was a brother's wife who was in needy circumstances to James Woodleigh, contractor, railway carrier, &c., &c., &c.?

"*Rap—rap—RAP.*"

My mother sprang to her feet, sat down again, and stared at me in an absent manner.

"Is that a knock, Robert, my dear?"

"Yes, mother."

"Who can it be at this time of night—Sunday, too?"

I glanced at the names before me.

"It can't be Uncle James, or—or any of my cousins, I should think!"

"Had you not better go to the door and see, my dear?" said my mother, startled at my observation, but trying to appear as unconcerned as possible.

I went out of the room and into the narrow passage. My mother kept no servant, and I was general attendant in leisure hours. The person outside was thinking of knocking again, when, opening the door suddenly, I jerked the knocker from his hand and left him with an arm in the air like a statue.

The moon had risen and was shining full on the door-step, therefore there was no difficulty in recognising the dusty gentleman who had arrived at so late an hour to evening service. There he stood, with his hat on the back of his head, and a diminutive carpet-bag in his hand, peering in at the dark passage and endeavouring to distinguish a human being in the background.

"Is Mrs. Woodleigh within?" was the inquiry, made in a deep voice.

"Yes, she is," I replied, with all the uncouthness of a boy of fourteen; "what do you want?"

"I wish to see her if you please."

I ran to the parlour door.

"Mother, here's a man."

"Say gentleman, little boy," remarked the stranger on the door-step.

"Gentleman," I corrected almost involuntarily.

"Show him in, Robert."

My mother whipped the spectacles off her nose, consigned them to the depths of a very long pocket, and I returned to the street door.

"Mother says you are to come in. She's in the best room."

"Which is the best room, my lad?"

"The first door—mind my cricket-bat."

The stranger took off his hat, groped his way along the dark passage—I had quite forgotten the necessity for a light—and

bent his ungainly form as he entered the room and made a bow to my mother.

"Take a seat, Sir."

"Thank you, Ma'am."

The man—or "gentleman," as he preferred it—took the first vacant chair and placed the carpet-bag at his feet, whilst I, keeping my eyes upon him, resumed my place before the Family Bible.

My position caught his eye.

"Ah! reading your Bible, my man," said he; "a book you cannot begin too early, or leave off too late. What was Mr. Parnell's text, boy?"

"Thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah and the tenth verse," I answered quickly.

The stranger smiled approvingly. I think he would have patted me on the head if I had given him any encouragement to take liberties. I looked askance at my mother, who did not seem particularly struck with my excellent memory.

"Your son, Ma'am?" the stranger inquired.

"Yes, Sir—my only one."

"A fine lad—how old is he?"

"Nearly fourteen."

"An age that requires watching—an age that receives every impression, good or bad, and moulds the character of the future man. I hope you take great care of him."

"To be sure, Sir!" said my mother, bridling up.

"I hope you, Sir," turning to me, "take care of your mother—study her comforts, honour her words, and obey her wishes. You will find it your greatest reproach in after life if you have disregarded her."

This was an extraordinary being. To walk into my mother's house late on Sunday night, take the first chair he could find, and begin talking like Mr. Parnell in his pulpit!

My mother softened towards the stranger at hearing this address; I coloured and she sighed. It was only yesterday that I had honoured her words and obeyed her wishes by refusing to remain in-doors, by rushing out on Nettleton Common to play with Tom Arrow, a racketsy lad, whose father, the chemist, had been looking for him everywhere.

A pause. My mother waiting for the stranger's explanation, the stranger occupied in removing his very large and shabby gloves. He proceeded to enlighten us at last.

"My name, Mrs. Woodleigh, is Bowden—a friend of your worthy pastor, Mr. Parnell."

"Oh! indeed," said my mother, looking with intentness at the speaker.

"Important business demanding Mr. Parnell's presence in London for some six or seven weeks, I have come to Nettleton as his unworthy substitute."

"Oh! indeed," said my mother a second time.

"I have been preaching at Wolverby this morning, Madam."

"This morning, Sir!" exclaimed my mother,—Wolverby was twenty-one miles from Nettleton.

"Yes, and being anxious to reach this town in time for my reverend friend's evening discourse, I did not flinch at a walk of twenty miles. It is a long walk though, and," glancing at his boots, "a very dusty road."

I began to guess the object of his visit.

"Being an entire stranger in Nettleton, and having an objection to lodgings at a public house, I have been forced to solicit the advice of Mr. Parnell. Mr. Parnell having a large family and a small house, cannot offer me the shelter of his roof, and has kindly recommended your apartments to me. You have a bed-room and sitting-room to let, I believe?"

"I am afraid it is—"

"My dear Madam," interrupted he, "pray do not pain me by apologies; the apartments will suit me, I am sure. I am only ashamed to enter them upon a Sunday evening—to speak of them on such a day. I shall not require much attendance, and shall give but little trouble," continued he, "so you will not find me an unpleasant lodger—but—"

He put a large brown hand to his mouth and coughed.

"—But we will not speak of worldly matters now, Madam, only it may be as well to add that I am a poor man—a poor teacher of the Word—and, and—apartments are not expensive at Nettleton, I suppose?"

"Very moderate, Sir," my mother replied; "there is no demand for lodgings in the town."

"It is a pretty place, too," he answered; "and what a pleasure it is to see our persuasion holds its ground here."

"A pleasure and a comfort, Sir."

Mr. Bowden did not appear particularly struck with the response; he fell into a reverie, and my mother taking this opportunity of retiring from the room, went up stairs to look to his apartments.

Mr. Bowden was tired and sleepy, as well as thoughtful, for my mother had not quitted the parlour five minutes before his

head dived to the right, dived to the left, nearly jerked itself off backwards, nearly fell into his lap forwards, and finally rested on his rusty black stock, in a position of profound repose. I sat and stared at him over the leaves of the great Bible, and thought that he was a very plain man, and wondered if I should look as ugly when I got as old ; wondered, too, why he had taken to preaching for his living, and if preaching was so bad a speculation, why he did not give it up and take to something else.

Mr. Bowden began to snore, and that frightened me. I had never heard a noise like it in my life, it was a rasping, choking, gurgling noise, that alarmed even my mother, and brought her down from the first floor to see what was the matter.

"It's only Mr. Bowden, mother. He has gone to sleep."

"Oh, dear ! I thought he was in a fit."

"Isn't it awful ? " I asked in a confidential whisper.

"Hush, Robert, my dear," said my mother ; "the gentleman is fatigued."

Mr. Bowden opened his eyes, looked for a moment vacantly at us both, then rose slowly to his feet.

"Your pardon, Mrs. Woodleigh," he said, "I fear my long walk has been too much for me. With your permission I will retire to my room."

"Have you supped, Sir ? "

"Thank you, yes. I supped with Mr. Parnell."

He took up his carpet-bag, and proceeded to follow my mother to his room.

"Good-night, my lad," he said to me, as he retired.

"Good-night, Sir."

When my mother had returned, and we were supping together in the front parlour, I alluded again to the stranger.

"He don't seem like a minister to me, mother."

"You should never judge a man by his looks, Robert."

"Who would have thought of those up stairs rooms being let to-night ? " said I, "why, we've had the bill about them in the window till it has got as brown as—as," a bright simile suggested itself, "as Mr. Bowden's hat !"

"I wish you would not talk in that manner, Robert," said my mother, gravely ; "honest poverty is no fit subject for a jest."

"I really was not jesting, mother," I replied ; "his hat is brown, you know—it's all true enough. I should like to know if he is—"

"Don't be curious, Robert," interrupted my mother ; "curi-

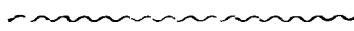
osity has led many an erring mortal from the narrow path—I wonder what Mr. Parnell is going to London for!”

Supper at an end, and the front parlour window fastened—not that there was occasion to fasten anything in Nettleton—mother and I went up stairs to our rooms.

As we neared Mr. Bowden’s apartments, my mother raised her finger by way of caution, and, fearful of disturbing the stranger’s rest, we trod more softly past the door. He was not asleep, though, he was either talking to himself or praying, for as we crossed the landing, we heard him say :—

“And God bless and forgive her, and turn her heart towards me!—Amen.”

“Amen, poor gentleman!” whispered my mother to herself, as we went lightly up the next flight of stairs.



CHAPTER II.

MR. BOWDEN.

In my opinion, Mr. Bowden did not improve upon acquaintance. He was a very good man in his way. I believe no one disputed that fact to the last day of his life; but he was no more a cheerful man to speak to than he was a nice man to look at. There was something stern and cold about him, which had a depressing effect on my youthful spirits, and the habit that he had of preaching at all times and seasons, was rather aggravating. I detected these striking points of his character before the Sunday came on which he was to deliver his first sermon to the Nettleton Methodists. And what a sermon that was, and how it astonished all the congregation, including my mother, and what a poor light of grace Mr. Parnell was considered ever afterwards!

Comparisons are odious; but even I—a small Methodist item—could not help being struck by the difference between Mr. Parnell and his successor *pro tem.* Mr. Parnell’s discourse was quiet, easy, and uncommonly soothing. Mr. Bowden’s was a red-hot, tearing piece of earnestness, which startled every sinner into attention, and made havoc on his conscience. Mr. Parnell, a little fat, white-haired man, used to stand exactly in the centre of the pulpit, clasp his dumpy hands together, and

prose away till a quarter to one. Mr. Bowden danced from one side of the pulpit to the other, banged with his fist on the cushion, frothed at the mouth like a maniac, and told us his mind as though he meant it. The afternoon witnessed a second specimen of extempore preaching in the same style, and in the evening two or three Church people who had heard of his performances came sneaking into our little chapel to judge for themselves.

"He's a wonderful man," said my mother, as we walked slowly towards home that Sunday evening, "a most wonderful man!"

I was silent.

"What do you think of him, Robert?" asked my mother

"He is not like Mr. Parnell."

"No, dear, but what do you think of him?"

"He's a very good man, mother, I dare say, but I wouldn't be that pulpit-cushion for any money!"

"Robert, Robert!" said my mother, half inclined to cry, "I wish there was more reverence in you. I'm afraid playing on the common does you a deal of harm."

"No it don't, mother. I like Mr. Bowden's preaching, I do, indeed—what I can understand of it. I did not shut my eyes once, and generally I am a little sleepy of a Sunday."

"Ah! my son, you will know better some day."

My mother had great faith in the future. She was always looking forward to the "some day" that never came! When my father was living, what visions she had had of his making a fortune, and what a comforter, with all her day-dreams, she had been to him! Sanguine in everything, she was looking forward still to her husband's brother and his family, hoping that the Mr. James Woodleigh, who ignored her existence, would do something "some day" for herself or her child. I need not say she was building a large castle in the clouds for that child. He was to be a wonderful man, make a great deal of money, be the best and most affectionate of sons, and a great and perpetual comfort to her all the rest of her days.

Well, such a disposition of mind is not the worst gift in the world; it consoles the possessor for the minor troubles of life, and though now and then the dreamer comes with a crash to the earth, still the future is for ever before him and there is no tax on cloud-land at present.

To return to Mr. Bowden. The six weeks of his stay at

Nettleton were not without their fruit. He stirred up the drowsy Methodists of Mr. Parnell's chapel, he taught them what was their duty, and he induced a few of the lower orders, rough beings who had never been able to stand preaching in their lives, to come and listen to him through windows and half-opened doors.

The people of Nettleton, who seldom took kindly to a stranger, and were generally anxious to know his birth, family and antecedents, the extent of his income, and his reason for troubling the town with his presence before they patronised him, became reconciled to Mr. Bowden's appearance in their midst, gave him "good-morning" when he crossed their paths, and touched their hats occasionally. For twenty miles round Nettleton he was well known too; he was a famous walker, and three or four times a-week he would startle the inhabitants of an out-of-the-way village by delivering a sermon to them on any plot of ground that was handy for the purpose. He was not always successful with his sermons or visitings; at times he was left on the field with his stool, his pocket Bible, and one or two gaping children; more than once a hardened navy to whom he was anxious to offer spiritual consolation had kindly suggested throwing him out of window, and now and then an ungodly few would object to the very hard names bestowed upon them and begin to giggle and shrug their shoulders irreverently; but on the whole he did some good, and if his success with the world were not commensurate with his expectations, why that's a disappointment that many poor wretches besides himself have experienced—the writer of this chronicle for one.

Mr. Bowden succeeded well enough in Nettleton, and although the town was not excited by his presence, yet he added a few converts to his flock and filled Nettleton Chapel every Sunday morning and evening. The afternoon service was a dull affair, even the majority of Methodists admired a little ease after dinner, and did not care for a walk up the hill with a lively sun on their backs all the way—it was a hindrance to digestion. My mother defied the long walk, the sun, and her digestive organs, and went with her boy to Nettleton Chapel on Sunday afternoons, and Mr. Bowden preached a sermon to her and me, three servant girls, a pious old man with an ear-trumpet, and the pew-opener.

At the expiration of six weeks, during which time Mr. Bowden's sermons, in my mother's opinion, had become quite

heavenly, and Mr. Bowden himself, despite his shabby gloves and the darn on his knee, quite heavenly too, there came a letter, with the London post-mark, addressed to our reverend lodger.

It was a Thursday evening, and Mr. Bowden had not returned from a preaching mission at a market town nine miles from Nettleton. It was a wet evening too, and there was every probability of Mr. Bowden coming back soaked, that gentleman having departed in the forenoon without an umbrella. There was a spirit of aggravation in the elements, for Mr. Bowden had only that morning speculated in a new hat, and gone out with it, quite a dandy.

My mother kept tripping up and down stairs—she was a light woman for her age—laying a fire in the little old-fashioned grate on the first floor, getting ready Mr. Bowden's only change of wearing apparel—oh! you should have seen his change of wearing apparel, my stars!—and placing his slippers before the chintz-covered easy-chair. I was occupied less busily; I was done up with the weather and the long confinement to the house. I walked up stairs several times, and looked in at Mr. Bowden's room to see how affairs were progressing. I went down stairs again, once by the natural way, and three times by the banisters, which were rickety; I looked out of the back door at the water butt which was running over, at the washhouse, the old pear tree, the narrow plot of ground embellished with cabbages, scarlet runners and gooseberry bushes, and at the leaden sky above them all; I looked out of the front door at Nettleton Common, and tried to think that it was clearing up a bit over the hills, and could not do it, so shut the door and dawdled into the parlour—the back parlour, not the best room—and took up Mr. Bowden's letter, and played at skimming it across the room until I nearly knocked a blue and yellow shepherdess off the mantelpiece. After sitting on every chair and lying full length on the sofa, I got my school bag, drew a chair to the table, laid out my books carefully, polished my slate with the sleeve of my jacket, opened Mr. Walkinghame at Barter, put one arm on the table, rested my head on my arm, and went off into a refreshing sleep.

“Why, Robert!”

I opened my eyes—I could only have been asleep a minute; but it had somehow got very dark, and the rain was rattling down in fine style.

"Why, Robert!" repeated my mother, "you have never been asleep?"

"I have just this moment shut my eyes. Oh! isn't it wet?" said I, yawning fearfully; "oh! won't our lodger come home jolly damp!"

"I wish he *would* come home," said my mother in a fidgety manner.

"So do I. I want to go to bed."

"Have you learned your lessons, Robert?"

"Oh! yes; it's all right, mother."

I returned my books and slate to the depths of my green-baize bag, and hung the bag behind the door. I had scarcely completed the operation when the well-known rap—rap—RAP of Mr. Bowden announced the return of the wandering Methodist.

Mr. Bowden entered the room in the dampest condition; he was glossy with wet; his clothes clung to him affectionately; his new hat was washed out of all shape, and there was a row of water drops all round the brim.

Mr. Bowden took his hat off and surveyed it ruefully.

"What a very unpleasant evening we have had, to be sure, Mrs. Woodleigh."

"We have, indeed, Sir."

"But the rain will do a great deal of good. Thank the Lord for all His mercies. How the wheat will grow after this!"

"Have you walked all the way home, Sir?" inquired my mother.

"No. I was fortunate enough to meet with Pierce, the corn chandler, three miles from Nettleton, and he brought me the rest of the way in his cart. He had no umbrella, but it was a very friendly action."

"Yes," said my mother, glancing at the muddy boots of Mr. Bowden, "and had you not better change your things at once, Sir? You may catch a severe cold. There's a letter for you up stairs, Sir. I have just put it on your table."

"Indeed," his colour changing. "From London?"

"There is the London post-mark on it."

"Is the address in a delicate, fine running-hand?" he inquired anxiously, "as if—as if written by a lady?"

"Round-hand," said I, breaking in upon the dialogue, "with very large capitals."

"Not a running-hand?" he asked.

"Oh! no, Sir; quite a sprawling hand."

Mr. Bowden walked thoughtfully from the room, leaving a puddle of rain water in the middle of the carpet. Half an hour afterwards, when my mother had prepared his supper tray, the door of his room was heard to open, and a pair of shuffling feet to descend the stairs.

A tapping at the door.

"Are you engaged, Mrs. Woodleigh?"

My mother actually blushed as she replied:—

"No, Sir."

Mr. Bowden re-entered the room, letter in hand. Mr. Bowden, in his change of dress, looked like a lucifer merchant in reduced circumstances.

"This letter contains important tidings, Mrs. Woodleigh," said he; "and you, as a member of our congregation,—and as a valued friend of mine, I trust I may add,—are entitled to the first hearing."

My mother, all expectation, waited for Mr. Bowden to proceed. With my eyes and ears very wide open, I waited also.

"Were you aware of the motive for Mr. Parnell's visit to London, Mrs. W.?"

"No, Sir."

"It was owing to the death of a relation of Mr. Parnell's—a relation with whom your pastor had been for many years past at variance, certain differences in matters of religion being, I believe, the cause. It is a pity that religion, of all things in the world, should sometimes part the best of friends."

"It is, indeed, Sir," said my mother.

"However, the relation did his duty at the last moment, and forgot not a deserving man. He has bequeathed seven thousand pounds to Mr. Parnell, and I think we may now venture to consider our friend in comfortable circumstances."

"Oh, dear me!" said my mother; "whoever could have thought it! Really, I am very glad to hear it, now."

And she was too—my full-hearted mother's eye sparkled, and she rubbed her hands together in the plenitude of her exhilaration. So my mother was not a person of common mind, you see, reader; for, though poor enough herself, she could take a pleasure in hearing of the success of her friends and her neighbours, which is not a weakness everybody indulges in, I can tell you.

"But I am sure you will regret to hear that our reverend

friend's change of prospects has brought about another change that will affect many in this little town. Mr. Parnell does not return to Nettleton."

"Not return to Nettleton!" repeated my mother, without much expression of regret in her tone.

"He will become the minister of a chapel at the West-end of the town,—a large chapel where there is greater scope for his abilities."

I thought I heard Mr. Bowden sigh.

"I trust he may bring many erring souls to the knowledge of the truth."

"Amen," said Mr. Bowden.

"But," asked my inquisitive mother, "who will succeed Mr. Parnell in our little chapel—who will—ahem, do you think—?"

Mr. Bowden indulged in one of his grim smiles.

"Some members of our congregation, Mrs. Woodleigh, have been writing flattering reports to Mr. Parnell concerning my unworthy self," he said; "Mr. Rigden, the saddler, amongst the rest."

Mr. Rigden was an influential member of our sect, I have before observed; he had quite the ruling of Nettleton Chapel, and a minister had never been appointed there without his will and consent having been previously obtained. He was one of the richest men in Nettleton, though he was a saddler, and quite a rival to Squire Heberdeen in the extent of his meadow land. His good word with the Methodist elect went a long way—it was a "Take-care-of-Dowb" sort of word, and was always followed by a significant result. Some words fall amongst thistles and get choked, but Mr. Rigden's were not of the number.

"There is no occasion, Mrs. Woodleigh, to disguise the fact that it would not only be a proud day for me to succeed Mr. Parnell, but that the salary, though a small one, would be also acceptable in the extreme," said he; "but I have not been what the world calls a lucky man, and misfortune has taught me the lesson not to build too much upon contingencies."

"I wish you every success, Sir."

"Thank you, Mrs. Woodleigh."

"I am sure if the wishes of the congregation be taken into consideration, you are certain of the appointment, Mr. Bowden."

"Thank you, thank you again," said he, with another of his odd smiles; "you flatter me, Mrs. Woodleigh—nay more, you

baoy me up with fallacies, and that will never do. I must be content with the result, whatever it may be. I think I have endured too many disappointments in my life to feel acutely now."

After a moment's silence, he thrust a letter into my mother's hands, saying :—

"You will read this. It is one of your pastor's true heart-speaking epistles, as gentle and devout as his good self. I should make a poor follower in his steps at Nettleton."

"Not at all, Sir."

"But I am intruding too long on your patience, Madam."

He made a movement to withdraw.

"Will you have up your supper tray now, Sir?"

"Not to-night, thank you. The wet weather, my long walk, or Mr. Parnell's letter, has robbed me of my appetite. Good-night, Mrs. Woodleigh."

"Ahem!" coughed my mother, in an embarrassed manner; "I have left a box of Grook's pills on your toilet table. They are very good things for cold—quite a preventive of cold, in fact, Sir."

Mr. Bowden thanked her, and retired.

My mother had great confidence in "Grook's Infallible Pills;" she believed them capable of curing all the ills that flesh is heir to—she consumed a great many herself, gave a great many to me in the spring and fall of the year, recommended them for all bruises and contusions, rheumatism, gout, spasms and sprained ankles. She prepared them herself from an old recipe of her grandmother, who had married a Grook of Ashton-under-Lyne, and, although she compounded them with very great care, and took extraordinary pains to make them all of one size, yet it did not render them less nasty, and as I always caught the flavour of *my* pills,—never being able to swallow them till the third effort—I did not wish myself in Mr. Bowden's slippers that night.

My mother snuffed the candle, put on her silver spectacles, and opened Mr. Parnell's letter. After the perusal, she refolded it carefully, restored her spectacles to the case, leaned her round little chin on her hand, and looked intently at the candle.

She fell into a brown study, and I sat and surveyed her drowsily. Heaven knows of what she was thinking—thought follows thought as wave follows wave, till the waters grow deep and bear us away from the present—but I startled her exceedingly twenty minutes afterwards, by saying :—

"A penny for your thoughts, mother!"

My mother jumped in her chair.

"Oh! dear, Robert," she cried, "how you have startled me—how can you be so silly? Shall we have supper now?"

"I don't much care about it, mother," said I, wearily.

"Then I think it's time we went to bed. These warm, close evenings take away one's appetite. I don't feel very well—I think I'll have a Grook's pill myself to-night."

CHAPTER III.

"REMEMBER, REMEMBER THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER."

WHETHER Fortune was tired of teasing Mr. Bowden, or the tide in the affairs of men was setting for once in a favourable direction; whether Mr. Rigden's vote and interest carried all before it, or whether Grook's pill had, in some mysterious way, exercised its effect on the fortunes of Mr. Bowden, it is not in the power of the writer to affirm—certain it is that my mother's lodger was solicited by the Methodists of Nettleton to become their good and watchful shepherd, and was duly installed in that responsible post.

Mr. Bowden did not talk of changing his apartments, although Mrs. Parnell and children had vacated the cottage near the chapel and started for London to join the lucky legatee. He was comfortably quartered in the house that looked upon the common, there were no household cares upon his mind, and the addition of sixty-two pounds a-year to his income offered no temptation to extravagance.

Therefore he remained my mother's lodger, and the nine days' wonder of a new minister at Nettleton Chapel passed away. The inauguration sermon was delivered, and Mr. Bowden settled down into quite an old inhabitant; little boys who met him in the green lanes, or in the quiet precincts of the town, no longer whispered in each other's ear "That be the Marthodeest parson, yonder!" but scraped with their feet, pulled at their front locks of hair, and gave him a "Good-morning, Sir."

Mr. Bowden, if elated by his good fortune, did not let his feelings master him; he was the same grave, strong-minded

being, and the only change he exhibited was in a new suit of broadcloth for Sunday wear, and uncommonly respectable he looked in it—I hardly knew him again.

Mr. Bowden having settled into a "permanency," my mother took a small specimen of humanity into her service as maid-of-all-work, which threw over the establishment quite an air of gentility. Mr. Bowden was "at home" at my mother's house—my mother had got used to all his ways and oddities; I was the only one to hold out—to feel that the minister was a stranger in the household, and that I should never be able to take kindly to him. With all his piety and earnestness, he had never won upon my heart; he had strange manners with him which I could not brook; he was too solemn and dictatorial; he was not a friend to youth, he could not sympathise with it. Moreover, I was a boy fond of my liberty, of my game on the green, of any game, in fact, that would keep me out of doors till nightfall, and Mr. Bowden, having serious objections to seeing boys idle one minute of their lives, was always remonstrating with my mother or me. His arguments were good, he could quote some excellent texts respecting time, its value, and the evils of wasting it, &c., but I was a high-spirited lad—nay more, a head-strong, hot-tempered lad, and could not, at thirteen years of age, submit to dictation from a stranger, though he was even the preacher at Nettleton Chapel.

I think I may say here, without egotism, that I was not a dull boy, although probably as inconsiderate as most youths of my age. Assuredly I was not slow to detect certain changes of manner in Mr. Bowden to my mother, certain varying shades of treatment adopted by my mother towards him.

Mr. Bowden came more often into the parlour, was more solicitous of my mother's advice concerning the management of his chapel, talked a great deal concerning his visiting duties and her own—for my mother had, even in Mr. Parnell's time, a certain number of the poor of Nettleton to attend, to help the distressed with the little money she could afford, and to read the Bible to those who were too ill or too ignorant to read for themselves.

When it came to *every* evening, when Mr. Bowden always stood at the parlour door discoursing, until my mother out of courtesy said—"Will you not step in, Mr. Bowden?" when Mr. Bowden *did* step in, and did not step out again till supper-time, when he looked at my mother long and earnestly, and

paid the strictest attention to all her suggestions, I began to have my suspicions, and to glow with secret indignation.

And how did my mother behave at this critical juncture? Why, she did what the sternest specimen of the fair sex would have done in a similar position. She thought it over before she declared war with the enemy, or ran up the white flag of truce.

She was only forty years of age, was certainly a pretty woman, and if there had not been the fly-leaf of the family Bible to stare her in the face, she could have told the world that she was thirty-five, and no one would have doubted the assertion. She was a pretty woman, I have said—for an amiable temper and the Nettleton breezes had kept her plump and rosy, and she was a good figure, too, thanks to Nature and staylaces. She was a devout woman, also—never thought of going to bed without prayers half an hour long, or having breakfast without a grace which was almost without an end at all. She was interested in Mr. Bowden's sermons, had been a widow more than six years, and "Mrs. Bowden" would not sound so oddly after all!

I do not affirm the above were exactly my mother's thoughts, but I think something like them flitted through her brain when Mr. Bowden began to cast sheep's eyes at her. Certainly a change came o'er the spirit of my mother's dream, though she was hardly aware of it herself. She had been always neat in her apparel, but she became still more particular—even snapped up the poor dressmaker for making her new merino a trifle too baggy in the waist—was careful about her hair and the set of her widow's cap, grew more thoughtful, took to blushing, and left off the silver spectacles. As for Mr. Bowden's praises, she sang them to me every day, was full of anecdotes of his good deeds, overflowing with remarks on his fine sermons, and as day after day cleared the mist before my eyes, and set me speculating on the future, so my admiration for the Methodist preacher grew less in proportion.

What business had he to think of my mother?—that mother who cried bitterly and said that she should never know a happy minute again when the doctor told her "There was no hope in this world for her husband?"—what business was it of his to be interested in all she did and said, to meet her and me every time we went to chapel, to walk by my mother's side, to offer her his arm?

Like a foolish boy as I was, I thought that I could thwart

these attentions by becoming sullen and morose, capricious in my temper, irregular in my movements, rude to Mr. Bowden. My perplexed mother—for she had not made up her mind yet—was pained at my eccentricities, could not account for them, sought advice and consolation in the eternal Methodist minister, wondered why I was so strange and unfilial, cried in the solitude of her own chamber at my general behaviour.

This unsatisfactory state of things continued till the beginning of November, eighteen hundred and forty-one. The day is well remembered.

It was the fifth of November. Mr. Myers, the schoolmaster, had been wheedled out of a holiday; he was a good-tempered, merry old fellow, and about as well qualified for a schoolmaster as I was. The whole day was before me and my comrades, and what a lively day we had determined to make of it! What a Guy Fawkes we had constructed for future annihilation on the common—a subscription Guy Fawkes, six feet high at least, with a man's hat on his head, and a pipe in his mouth! My bosom friend and confidant, Tom Arrow—one year my senior, biggest boy at Myers' school, son of Arrow, the chemist, opposite the Bell Inn, a boy who was always getting into scrapes himself and leading me into more than I should have got into alone—found the coat and the boots, four youths of my acquaintance contributed the stuffing, the hat and the waistcoat, and I had taken the liberty of borrowing Mr. Bowden's trousers—the old pair with the fine-drawing on the knee.

It was a vile habit of my mother's to be nervous on the fifth of November; she had a womanly horror of bonfires and fireworks, and was always fearful on that day of my being blown up or burnt to ashes. Therefore it was not till tea-time, when it was quite dark and Tom Arrow was significantly whistling outside, that I broke the ice concerning my intentions.

"I'm just going out for half an hour or so, mother."

"To-night!" said my mother in reply; "why, it's pitch dark, Robert, and you have a little cold, you know. I really would not go out to-night, my dear—I would stay at home and take a Grook."

I had expected a certain amount of opposition, and was prepared with my defence.

"I shall be home at eight o'clock precisely. Tom Arrow promised his father he would be home *before* eight, mother."

"Oh! that Tom Arrow. He is always leading you into mischief."

"I'm not going into mischief, mother."

"Where are you going?"

"On the common for—for a walk."

"Oh dear!—and it's Guy Fawkes night, and all the riff-raff of the town will be letting off those nasty fireworks;—now don't go too near the fireworks, there's a good boy."

"Not for the world, mother!"

"And don't be later than eight, or I shall be very uneasy about you, Robert. And there are your lessons to learn, remember: Mr. Bowden says he is sure you do not half learn your lessons."

"It's no business of Mr. Bowden's—he's always poking his—"

"Robert, my dear!" cried my mother, sharply.

"And so he is!" said I, surlily pushing away my chair and snatching up my cap; "and I can never say a word without it's Mr. Bowden this, and Mr. Bowden that—I don't care for him, and you can tell him so!"

"You are a very wicked boy, Robert," said my mother, with a heightened colour; "and I hope you will not come to a bad end, that's all."

"Bad end!" exclaimed I; "why, it's enough to make me fling myself head foremost into the first bonfire I can find to-night."

"Good gracious, boy!" cried my mother, turning pale, "don't talk so awfully, don't. What is enough to make you, Robert?"

Having almost forgotten the primary subject of dispute in my excitement, I answered:

"Never mind."

"There, go and play, and pray don't go too near the fireworks—OH! what's that?"

BANG!

Master Arrow, tired of waiting outside and doing nothing, was letting off the squibs to while away the time, and fearful of his precipitations, I put an end to the dialogue with my mother, by rushing into the street.

I found not only Tom Arrow outside, but a round dozen of my schoolfellows, sitting on the door-steps, with the Guy in their arms. After my appearance had been hailed with a shout that must have frightened my mother, and even Mr. Bowden, who was up stairs in his own room thinking over his Sunday's sermons, we hurried off in a body to the common, bearing Fawkes on our shoulders.

Nettleton Common wore a brisk and lively aspect that evening ; the townsfolk, who were fond of combustibles, having assembled in great force.

Our pocket-money having been limited, our powder and fireworks had soon become memories of the past, and we were left with nothing to do but watch the burning Guy and the squibs and crackers of our contemporaries. Whilst thus employed, Tom Arrow, who had taken a survey of the country, gave a loud

"Hollo !"

"What's the matter, Tom ?"

"Oh ! hasn't Squire Heberdeen got a prime set-out over there, Bob. By George, there goes a fire balloon !—come on !"

Tom was off like a shot across the common, and the rest of us were quickly after him, tearing over the damp grass, leaping ditches, and breaking through hedges and furze-bushes in the direction of Squire Heberdeen's house, a large, old-fashioned red-brick mansion, hemmed round by sturdy elms that had weathered the storms of a hundred years. Upon our nearer approach we discovered that the fireworks were being let off in the orchard at the rear of the house, and as the orchard was surrounded by a high brick wall, ornamented on the top with broken glass, we paused in a meadow into which we had unceremoniously intruded, and held a hasty council of war.

"What's to be done, Tom ?"

"I don't much care about getting on that wall," said Tom.

"Oh ! there are not many broken bottles," remarked a youth of nine, who was evidently of an ambitious turn of mind. "Hark ! they are talking about serpents ! Let's chance it !"

"And I see two fellows already on the wall under the pear-tree," I cried ; "here goes—follow my leader !"

And with a dash at the wall, and totally regardless of consequences, I gave a spring and clambered to the summit, where I found the glass rather sharp—what there was of it. The rest of us had soon taken up our posts of observation, and the noise in the orchard being great, the attention of its occupants entirely absorbed, and the shadows of the trees near the wall affording a fair screen, our arrival passed unnoticed.

There was a select company of about thirty in the orchard—men, women, and children. There was a bonfire too, and

as the dark figures of the company passed before its blaze, I could distinguish one or two persons well known in the village of Nettleton. There was the Squire himself, as tall as a Life Guardsman, and as full of pranks as a monkey, running about the orchard with lighted squibs in his hands and frightening the ladies, whose little screams and merry laughs made the place ring again. How he did laugh himself too, and what a fat hearty laugh he had ! There was the curate of Nettleton Church, buttoned up to the throat, simpering at everything, and keeping as well as he could behind the skirts of the ladies—of course he was a ladies' man, for curates always are—and taking to his heels with the fair sex whenever the Squire or any gentleman of his acquaintance dashed in his direction. There was young Heberdeen too—"young Impudence," as the townsfolk called him, under the rose—imitating his father, and squibbing everybody, his sire included ; and there were rich neighbours of the Squire, and their sons and daughters, and Miss Heberdeen, a tall and pretty girl, and Mrs. Heberdeen, a slight and graceful lady of about six and thirty years of age. It was quite a jubilee in the orchard below—there were half-a-dozen huge firework devices yet to be ignited, and Tom Arrow and I congratulated ourselves on having arrived in time for them—there was another fire-balloon getting ready, and the incessant firing of squibs and crackers was being kept up in twenty different places.

"Isn't this stunning ?" whispered Arrow, exultingly.

"I hope they won't see us," I replied. "Where are the other chaps ?"

"Oh ! they are somewhere hereabouts—I say."

"What's the matter ?"

"Don't I wish I was young Heberdeen, to have such a lot of fireworks, and—oh ! don't these bottles hurt !"

"Do hold your tongue, Tom," I entreated, "or I'm blest if they won't hear us."

"It's all very fine to say hold your tongue," grumbled Tom, "but I have got on a sharp place. Just get up a little higher, will you ?"

"I can't ; here's a fellow next me won't move an inch."

Tom looked round me at "the fellow" alluded to—a gawky, ragged gipsy-boy, with bare feet and no jacket or cap on—and asked him to be kind enough to move up higher. The gipsy-boy, who had been at some pains to dislodge the broken glass

from the mortar in his vicinity, very naturally declined to shift his quarters, and as he was a very big boy, and accompanied by a friend much bigger, we did not care to be too urgent. Still there are bounds even to the temper of a saint, and my amiability began to get ruffled as the gipsy-boy persisted in putting a shock head of hair before my eyes, and intercepting my view whenever there was anything worth seeing going on. No remonstrances of mine could induce this individual to consider his behaviour selfish, and as he replied to my objections with an uncouth gibberish which neither I nor Arrow comprehended, there was no arranging the difficulty with him.

Meanwhile the squibbing, the shouting, and the laughing went on below in the orchard; everybody was in the best of spirits there. The Squire, the ladies, the gentlemen, young Heberdeen and his boy friends, darted here and there, and the constant passing and repassing the broad bright flame of the bonfire made me dizzy at my post. Suddenly there was a shout of laughter, a rush of half a dozen gentlemen with lighted squibs, and a vigorous attack made on those less fortunate companions of mine who had posted themselves in a conspicuous place. More roars of laughter, the Squire stamping about the orchard and holding his sides, a hasty scrambling down the wall, my comrades scouring across the meadow and making for the high road.

"It's all right. They have gone back—they don't see us," said Tom.

The gipsy-boy on the other side of me leaned forward and chattered something, making a gesture of silence at the same time. Tom Arrow, paying no attention, continued to congratulate himself and me in a loud voice, till the gipsy-boy, leaning more forward still, flung suddenly a long arm and hand out, and caught Tom a "back-hander" on the nose.

"Come, I say," cried Tom, whose blood began to boil as well as run, "I'm not going to stand that, I can tell you, you gipsy blackguard!"

Tom, holding my shoulder for support, threw himself round me and aimed a savage blow at his insulter, who, with an alertness that showed considerable practice, jerked up his right arm and nearly broke Tom's wrist. But this manœuvring of the party on each side of me proved too much for my equilibrium, and I fell forward, bearing Arrow, whose position was precarious, in the same direction.

"Hold tight, you, Bob!" shrieked Arrow.

"I can't!" I yelled, making a despairing clutch at the gipsy-boy, who kicked and fought madly in his efforts to elude my grasp. It was too late, there was a slight scuffle, a cry, and then Tom, I, and the two gipsies came down all of a heap into the orchard.

"Tally-ho!" cried the Squire; "here are some more young vagabonds on the premises. Roast them out, there. Make ready, present, fire!"

Whiz—bang came the squibs amongst us; the gipsy-boys were on their feet and over the wall again with cat-like celerity. Tom and I gave a despairing leap in the same direction, brought our heads together with a crash, and once more reposed full length on Squire Heberdeen's grass.

The shadowy trees, the bonfire, and the guests of Mr. Heberdeen spun round before my eyes, and it was some moments before I could collect my senses in any decent order. When the squibbing had ceased and I had become conscious of my position, I found Tom sitting by my side and rubbing his head, a dog barking and jumping about, and quite a ring of faces round us.

"I am afraid they are hurt, papa," I heard Miss Heberdeen remark.

"Confound the rascals," cried the Squire, "to come scaling the walls like young housebreakers. Get up, there—be off, boys—be off! I hope," he said, his voice suddenly softening, "that you have not hurt yourselves, you scamps!"

"No, no, Sir," said Tom, rising; "you see it was all an accident, Sir—of course we never meant to come here. You see, Squire, we were walking quietly along the high road when——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Squire, impatiently; "very quietly, I have no doubt. Who are you?"

"Master Arrow, if you please, Sir."

"What, the chemist's son?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Thought I knew your face somewhere; and now, Sir," turning to me, "whose son are you?"

But my attention had become absorbed by the dog, which, encouraged by young Heberdeen, was barking and jumping nearer and nearer, and showing all its teeth in a very unpleasant manner. It was a wiry-haired, bristling, prick-eared terrier, whose countenance expressed the most intense ferocity.

"Call that dog off, Squire Heberdeen," I cried; "tell your son to hold him off, or he'll bite one of us."

The Squire laughed at my alarm.

I felt my irritable tempers rising; the ring of faces, on many of which was expressed a kind of contemptuous curiosity, the pain I felt from my fall, the ridiculous figure I was conscious of presenting, the snapping of the dog so close to my heels, and the evident enjoyment which the Squire and his son were taking in my fears, all tended to arouse me.

Looking daggers at young Heberdeen, I said:—

"You are fast enough now with your dog, young Squire. Had I met you in the lanes alone, you would have run away for fear of another black eye."

"I'm not afraid of you," retorted young Heberdeen; "I never was, you know. You can't say I ever ran away from you in all my life. Bite him, Ponto."

I stooped and picked up a formidable three-cornered stone.

"He'd better," said I, significantly.

"Ponto, down!" shouted the Squire, who was becoming tired of this interruption to his festivities.

The dog crouched on the grass at the feet of his young master.

"Stones, eh?" said the Squire. "You are a nice lad to trespass upon a gentleman's grounds, and then think of splitting some one's head open. What's your name?"

I did not answer. He came nearer to me, took the stone out of my hand, and looked me in the face.

"Young Woodleigh, is it not?"

"Yes, Sir," answered Tom Arrow, very officiously.

"Pity your mother does not bring you up better, or keep you in doors more often. I have heard of you before, my lad."

"You have heard nothing wrong of me, Squire Heberdeen."

"You are the boy who has twice insulted and struck my son."

"I struck him in self-defence; I struck him for interfering with me, didn't I, Tom? Grand as he is, I'm not afraid of him."

"There, be off, be off. You are a black sheep, and will never come to any good!"

"Which way are we to go, Sir?" inquired Tom Arrow with a polite bow.

"Through the side gate to the left, and don't let me catch either of you here again, or I shall certainly horsewhip you."

"It was entirely an accident, Sir, I assure you," murmured Tom, as we walked slowly in the direction of the gate which opened into the meadow, and at which one of Squire Heberdeen's grooms was waiting. Tom slunk along, crestfallen enough; he did not once look up at the faces of Squire Heberdeen's guests, who seemed anxious to catch a glimpse of the impudent intruders; I, less abashed, or more defiant, lowered at them from under my bent brows. I heard them murmuring—

"An evil-looking lad—a bold young rascal—a bad boy!" till the orchard gate was slammed behind us.

"You coward!" I said to Arrow when we were in the meadow.

"What am I a coward for?" Tom asked.

"For saying nothing—for letting them call you anything they pleased."

"I didn't want to get into any more scrapes. Squire Heberdeen's one of my father's best customers, and Mrs. Heberdeen is always coming into the shop with cough prescriptions to be made up. It would not have done, Bob, and oh——"

I was a few paces in advance. I stopped and looked back at him.

"What's the matter now?"

"Oh! haven't you torn, Bob!—oh! haven't you," he cried, with a shriek of laughter—"just torn your corduroys!"

It was too true. It is the last feather breaks the camel's back—it was the last moment on the broken glass that had brought me into disgrace and ruined a fine pair of trousers. Tom Arrow and I walked disconsolately into Nettleton—I keeping in the shadow of the old-fashioned houses, and shunning the lights from the few shop-windows which remained open; Tom full of fear of what his father would say, I full of bad temper.

Miserable fifth of November! Miserable Robert Woodleigh! whose troubles that night were not ended.

CHAPTER IV

A WIDOW BEWITCHED.

It was striking ten when I knocked at my mother's door. Sarab, the small maid, hardly knew me as she let me into the passage, I was so disreputable an object.

"Lor ! is that really you, Master Robert ? "

"Never *you* mind who it is. Where's mother ? "

"In the parlour along with Mr. Bowden."

"Along with Mr. Bowden, eh ? It seems as if—why don't you go down stairs ? "

The servant-maid hastily departed, and I stood on the mat before the front parlour door, and debated whether I should enter or not. I was two hours behind time ; my appearance was certainly not respectable ; I had torn my clothes in an unseemly manner ; my face was black, and my hands were scratched with the glass from Squire Heberdeen's wall. There would be questions put to me as to where I had been and what I had been doing ; Mr. Bowden would sit and frown at me, and, backed by the approving nods of my mother, perhaps treat me to a sermon all to myself. Still I was curious ; there was a jealous feeling at my heart. Mr. Bowden was generally in bed by ten o'clock at night, was always in his own room at least—what did he want keeping my mother company at so late an hour ?

Yes, I would go in.

Without taking the trouble to announce my arrival by a preliminary tap on the panel of the door, I turned the handle, and rather unceremoniously walked into the parlour.

Mr. Bowden was sitting by the side of my mother, my mother was looking shyly at the fire. He had been holding her hand in his ; I saw it hurriedly drawn away as I advanced into the room. Mr. Bowden gave a hard dry cough, and scratched his head—he was conscious that a man of fifty doing the amiable was not exactly a sensible or improving spectacle—and my mother for a moment was too abashed to look at me.

She turned her blushing face towards me at last, and said :—

"So you have come home, Robert ? "

"Yes," I answered moodily.

"You are very late, dear—it's past nine o'clock."

"It's past ten!"

Mr. Bowden came to the rescue.

"You have had a long holiday, Master Robert. I suppose you are tired?"

I regarded Mr. Bowden with no reverent looks. It did not matter to me that he was a Methodist minister, head of my mother's chapel, and respected in the town. He was trying to rob me of my mother's love—to make my mother forget that father who had been fond of *me*! He was a man I had never liked; he was old, and poor, and ugly, and yet he had found a way to touch my mother's heart.

I was a boy of little thought or feeling, of less command of temper, impetuous and saucy. My answer was quite worthy of me.

"I don't care whether I am tired or not—no more do you."

Mr. Bowden began to blush then and look angry, till my mother whispered something in his ear. He coughed, and rubbed his white-brown hair vigorously.

"Will you come and sit down, Robert?" asked my mother.

"No."

"Mr. Bowden wishes to speak with you, my dear. Come and sit down a moment."

"You don't want me—you had rather be alone together. I—I—I am going up stairs!"

Half choking, I tore out of the parlour, and dashed up to my own little room, where I flung myself at the bed's foot, and, burying my face in the patchwork counterpane, cried passionately and bitterly.

The moon had risen and was shining in my chamber; all was calm and still, all in contrast to my own turbulent feelings. Five minutes could not have passed thus before I felt two warm arms round my neck and a mother's face against my own.

"Robert, dear, Robert, dear, won't you speak to me?"

I sobbed and struggled, but the arms retained their hold.

"You must hear what I have to say, Robert—you loved your mother once, boy."

"She loved *me* once, but now——"

"But now she loves you more than ever—loves her child before anyone or anything in this world."

"It is not true!"

"It *is*," my mother said. "Now will you listen to me?"

"Yes."

The arms pressed more fondly round my neck as she knelt by my side and told her story to me.

"Mr. Bowden has asked me, Robert, dear, to marry him. He is the best of men, the kindest-hearted in his way. I—I think I should be happy if I were his wife—I think he would make you a good father, and love you as his son."

"No, no."

"Yes, yes. You do not know him, Robert—you have cruelly misunderstood him."

"Go on."

"I have thought of this some time—have spent many sleepless nights in dwelling on it. Passing over my own feelings, my own wishes, Robert, I believe it will be acting for the best to marry him, for it gives another protector to my child."

"But——"

"But, Robert," said she, interrupting me, "if you feel that you will be unhappy, that there is misery before you, that you can never love him, or that you will love your mother less, why, say so truly, dear, and ask me not to have him. The mother thinks of her fatherless boy's happiness before her, own or any one's."

She strained me to her breast, and her tears fell on me. I was softened, all the evil in my nature melted away that night, and I was my true mother's child. I flung my arms round her, crying:—

"Not for my sake, mother, not for mine! I am a wicked, selfish boy, and the last one to be studied in the world. Don't mind me, care for me. I am sure you will be happy, and I shall be happy too, in time, perhaps. He will make me a good father—not like that one—that one——"

I broke down again, and my mother cried with me for company's sake.

After a while my mother murmured,

"Will you come down stairs and speak to Mr. Bowden, Robert?"

"It will not please him to see me."

"It will please your mother."

"Very well, then," said I, with a sigh.

Mother and son got up from their knees at the bedside, and went down stairs to Mr. Bowden. We found him sitting before the fire, his hands upon his knees, his chin between

his hands in a reflective attitude. Had he repented his precipitation and wished he had not done it? Marriage is a venturesome game, and there are a good many blanks in the lucky-bag which Dame Fortune shakes in our faces.

"Jacob," said my mother, "here's Robert."

Jacob! Good Heaven! had it come to Jacob already?

Jacob Bowden looked up, turned round, and extended his hard hand—had he been a blacksmith by profession, it could not have been harder.

When my hand was in his, he held it firmly, saying:—

"Has your mother told you all, Robert?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You are sorry, I think?"

"Not now, Mr. Bowden."

"I hope that you will not have cause to feel sorry again. I hope we shall be better friends, boy."

I hung my head. There was a kindness, even a gentleness, in his manner of addressing me, that was strangely different to his usual way.

He continued.

"I think we shall agree together, Robert, if I exercise a little patience, and you a little more restraint—if you will believe all I do and say is for your welfare, and look upon me as a second father, who has a right to warn and hinder you from evil."

He was talking of warning and hindering already! I could see the future before me. I knew how the story would end; but what could I say that night, with him so earnest and my mother by his side so anxious?

"As your father, I shall have a right to exercise a watch upon your actions; I should be failing in my duty were I to neglect it. If you have confidence in me, we shall get on very well together, Robert."

"I hope we shall, Sir."

"You must not misjudge me, or misconstrue my motives," said he, as he released my hand with a friendly pressure; "that will be doing me a cruel wrong. I have been an unhappy man for many, many years, through those nearest and dearest to me putting a false construction on my actions. It is easy to do that, and yet it is easy to avoid it!"

"Robert will be the best of boys," observed my sanguine mother.

"Perhaps my unhappiness, with a blessing from above, will

cease with my new life," said he. I shall have a faithful and devout wife, and that is the greatest comfort man can have on earth. Robert," turning to me, "you do not know that I have a daughter."

I looked up very much surprised.

"It is a painful subject, and I have spoken little of it, save to your mother lately. My daughter has misunderstood me all my life; and, God forgive her! has little love or respect for her poor father. Pride and self-confidence have induced her to seek her own way in life; I pray they may not fail her in her hour of need, as they have failed so many."

His voice was growing husky, and he had to cough two or three times, and turn away his head a moment before he could conclude.

"I speak of her, Robert, at this time, because there are some traits in your character akin to hers, and you remind me of her. But you are a boy yet; you love your mother and honour your father's memory; there may be a bright future waiting for you; who knows?"

Who knows, indeed! who has foreknowledge of what is waiting behind the impenetrable screen that separates the present from the life beyond—what fears, hopes, joys, sorrows, are crowding together in the background, and biding their turn to make or break him? I do not think that a very wise aphorism which says, "The child is father to the man." Man is a mystery, and too often ends his pilgrimage with little stamp of his past childhood on him.

I thought Mr. Bowden might be in the right, that there might be also a fair future waiting for little Bob Woodleigh, with the torn corduroys. So did my mother—so had always my mother, for the matter of that. *She*, honest old heart, saw all the virtues I had with a magnifying glass, and heaps of virtues I had not too, and drew one of those fancy pictures in fugitive colours, which mothers and fathers will indulge in till there are no more children to sketch in the foreground of life.

Mr. Bowden and I shook hands again before I retraced my steps to the bed-room. Then my mother came stealing up stairs to kiss me once more; to ask, somewhat anxiously, how I liked Mr. Bowden now!

"Better, mother, better."

"God bless you, boy! I knew you would. How pale you

are looking, and, dear me, how you have torn your clothes ! ”

She thrust something hard into my hand.

“These will comfort you to-night. Don’t spare them, Robert, take as many as you like.”

I opened my hand and gazed ruefully at the long wooden box within it.

“GROOK’S PILLS ! ”

CHAPTER V.

THE HAPPY FAIR.

IT was soon over Nettleton town that Mr. Bowden and the pretty Widow Woodleigh were engaged to be married. Neither Mr. Bowden nor my mother had dropped a single word concerning the engagement, and yet the world of Nettleton, that is everyone of the feminine gender, knew all about it, and had a great deal to say for and against the match—it being a grand subject, and nobody’s business.

Every female in Nettleton could have told you—even Mrs. Jinks, the pew-opener of Nettleton Chapel, who had bad eyes, and wore a green shade to her antediluvian bonnet—that she had seen this, oh ! ever so long ago ; that Mrs. Woodleigh had been setting her cap for months and months at the preacher, who was a poor innocent fellow to fall so unsuspectingly into the net which Delilah had spread for him. Yes, it was a fact ; there he was, dear lamb, going to be married !—“to be married to a woman,” said Miss Perks, a Methodist lady of uncertain age and a certain income of thirty-eight pounds a-year in ground rents, “without a feather to fly with ! ”

Well, they were a queer couple, certainly ; they were not going to be married for money, so I suppose it was a love-match, and that made people spiteful.

My mother had always a reverence for preachers—Methodist preachers in particular. She believed they possessed every virtue under heaven, and practised infinitely more than they preached, and were the best of company in the pulpit or out of it. Since her residence in Nettleton, she had

been one of the most earnest of the Methodist flock, and had quarrelled more than once with her neighbours for not seeing the brightest of halos round Mr. Parnell's fat little head; and when Mr. Bowden's turn came to reign, her allegiance had been just as faithful — more faithful, satirical people observed, for the reason that Mr. Bowden was a widower and easily imposed upon. Therefore, when that gentleman, a real Methodist minister, was smitten with the fair face and buxom form of my mother, my mother was naturally flattered, and when he told her the story of how unfortunate he had been all his life, my mother pitied him, — and pity is akin to love, everybody knows! There was a little pride, too, in being the minister's wife, at the bottom of it, and more thought, as she had already confessed, for her son, who would have a devout man for a protector and counsellor.

And there was little selfishness, if any, in Mr. Bowden's motives. He was about to marry a widow lady of forty years of age, who had an ill-tempered, headstrong boy of thirteen for a son—a widow who had but little money in the world to add to his own scanty income; who was, between you and me, reader, even one quarter back in her rent! But then, my mother looked the picture of good temper — and she did not belie her looks — was a truly pious, gentle, charitable woman, a careful woman, too, who had never spent a waste penny in her life, unless it was on her son now and then, when he had been more than usually coaxing. She must have presented a striking contrast to Mrs. Bowden the first, who I have every reason to believe was a Tartar.

So Mr. Bowden was married to Mrs. Woodleigh. He had grown tired of single blessedness and sewing on his own shirt-buttons; therefore, he took to himself the best-looking widow in Nettleton, and was married by Mr. Parnell—who came expressly from London to conduct the ceremony—in the little Methodist chapel on the hill. Mr. Parnell left for London immediately after the nuptial knot was tied, and my mother, my new father, and I, returned in stately procession to the town.

Mr. Bowden's self-possession under trying circumstances was something remarkable, for he walked through the High Street with his step as firm and his countenance as grim as ever, despite the sly looks of his neighbours, every one of whom knew where he had been, and on what errand. My

mother kept her eyes fixed on the little round stones which formed the footway, and counted them all the way home, whilst I felt as red and confused at the peeping from doors and over window-blinds, as though I had been married myself.

There was a wedding-breakfast awaiting us, and several delicacies of the season to be discussed, including some oranges and a cocoanut, provided by a thoughtful mother who knew my tastes to a nicety. But, somehow, the oranges were sour, the cocoanut was of a peculiar flavour, and I think a Barmecide feast that day would have agreed with me better.

It was a dreary festival; my mother and I were thoughtful, and Mr. Bowden did not say much to cheer us up, and did not even sing us a hymn in long metre.

And in that little room, from which this history first dates, it is well to close the scene—a new era of life beginning for the wilful son, as well as for the blushing mother.

So far on my progress, I begin again with lighter heart and hand less faint. It is the dwelling on the quiet days which unnerves me most—days which, to look back upon, bring the tears to my eyes. It is a sunny green spot, that life in Nettleton before my mother's marriage—despite those little troubles that came to me when I saw through the game of courtship and matrimony which my mother and the preacher were playing. The oasis is past, and there is desert land coming.

Well, there is desert land on the road of most fellow-travellers. He is a happy man who has basked in sunshine all his life and had nothing to cross him. Crosses are for the children of men; I have had my share of them, and have at least borne them without crying my eyes out and raving at fortune. Better men than I have had worse ones,—calmer men, men with cooler heads, would have resisted such troubles as mine, and come off with less wounds in the mêlée. But then I was headstrong and had a will of my own. On the fifth of November, Squire Heberdeen told me that I was a black sheep, and predicted that I should never come to any good, and Squire Heberdeen was not far out in his prophecy.

BOOK II.

THE RUNAWAY.

“What, Master Lessingham!
You that were wont to be compos'd of mirth,
All spirit and fire, alacrity itself,
Like the lustre of a late bright-shining sun,
Now wrapt in clouds and darkness!”

WEBSTER.

“Oh, if your father knew this, what a lecture
Of bitter castigation he would read you!”

GEORGE CHAPMAN.

CHAPTER I.

PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

WHEN Mr. Parnell joined together the hands of Jacob Bowden, widower, and Sarah Woodleigh, widow, I felt assured—even in the little chapel where the happy pair of Methodists were plighting troth—that a dismal time of it was coming. Mr. Bowden had said—"As your father, I shall have a right to exercise a watch over your actions," and I was pretty certain that that watch would be a strict one. Confident on that point, I did not join very heartily in the wedding festivities, despite the gracious manner of my step-father. I knew the gracious manner would depart, the old sternness speedily return, and Jacob Bowden be himself again before many weeks went over his head.

Right enough too, Robert Woodleigh; for before the spring blossoms came, or Nettleton Woods were green, Mr. Bowden was indeed a father to me! He took the greatest care of me; he would not hear of my being out after dark, of putting away my school-books in the green-baize bag until I had recited the morrow's lessons to him, of idling in the lanes, of talking with Tom Arrow at his father's shop-door when I was sent on errands, of playing at "buttons," which he considered gambling, of singing comic songs from the Penny Warbler—a work I had subscribed to for upwards of sixteen months, and which he styled a profane and vulgar publication.

This was the beginning—the first fruits off a very hard and ugly tree of the crab-apple species—there was more to follow as the world went round.

Still I bore it all; I had made up my mind to do that before my mother's marriage, for that mother's sake. She was happy; Mr. Bowden had become the idol of her worship, and Mr. Bowden was very fond of her. He had found a woman who could see no faults in him, who obeyed his slightest wish, and who would have thought it a terrible sin to contradict a Methodist minister—and such a minister!

What I think of Mr. Bowden now, is very different from my past opinion of him. The boy never did him justice, the

man at least attempts it. I know he meant me well, but I do not believe, even at this present moment when I can look back at all that is past calmly and philosophically, that he went the best way to educe the good from me. It is not every tree that can be forced the same way—one will bend to the will of the trainer, but another will break.

Mr. Bowden made his first grand move on the board in the beginning of March.

"Let me see," he remarked one evening as we sat at tea, "let me see, Robert; you are going on for fifteen, are you not?"

"Yes," said my mother, answering my question, and regarding me with that motherly look which never vanished from her eyes, "fifteen—what a big boy he is growing, to be sure! His things are always too short for him."

"I am running up, rather," I observed; "I wish I did not grow so fast, for these corduroys of mine will soon be knecbrecches, mother."

My mother smiled; Mr. Bowden, who had an objection to levity, and who was about to introduce a grave subject, did not alter his expression of countenance.

"Fifteen next November," said Mr. Bowden, "and so ignorant for his age too! It is very sad."

I looked up at this. Ignorant, indeed! Why, I had been in four syllables ever so long, and as for my knowledge of arithmetic, geography, and those sort of things, it was quite wonderful in my opinion. Even my mother could not believe his assertion.

"Ignorant, Jacob!" she exclaimed, with that faint air of surprise which was habitual to her; "did you say ignorant, dear?"

"Yes, Sarah, I did say ignorant. And I think too," breaking upon new ground with a loud cough, "that Robert will always remain ignorant while he keeps at that trumpery and ridiculous school. The lessons are trivial, the school-master has no firmness, no style, in fact; the time is wasted by master and pupils, and it's my firm opinion that they are all idle together."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated my mother, "and to think that I have been paying a shilling a-week for the last five years!"

I sat and ate my thick slice of bread-and-butter, gravely surveying my step-father, and inwardly murmuring, "Go

it!" There was nothing to say in defence at present. I had hardly become used to Mr. Bowden or his ways, and I was not aware of his reasons for expatiating on my wretched state of ignorance.

"The money has been absolutely thrown away, and Robert has lost valuable opportunities of improvement, both in school and out of it. It is time to make a change, Sarah."

Sarah perfectly coincided, of course.

"Therefore, for the future I shall teach Robert myself."

I felt my heart sink to a fathomless depth within me. Five hundred Grook's pills could not have affected me with so awful a sensation.

"I have time on my hands," he continued, "I have confidence in my theory of education, and I see no excuse for throwing a shilling every week into the street."

"But——" I began.

"But, Robert," he interrupted, "you must grant me a fair trial. You have had five years in Mr. Myers's school, and have not profited therein; now put yourself in my hands."

It was no use saying I would rather put myself in the hands of anybody on earth or under it than his; when Mr. Bowden had once made up his mind, nothing short of a thunderbolt could change it. He was a very firm man; Virginius, Marcus Curtius, Junius Brutus, and other respectable Romans must have been something like him, and if he had been born in their day, how they would have admired him, and cried, "Hail, brother, well met!" Oh! if he had only been born in their day, how comfortable it would have been!

It was all arranged and settled that evening. From next Monday week I was to give up that dear old boy's school of mine, where the tasks were easy, and the punishment mild—where the boys were merry, and "Jolly companions every one"—where I, Bob Woodleigh, was thought a great deal of, and where Tom Arrow played Pythias to my Damon! Give up the fun in that half-mile walk home, give up all that little world which goes far to make youth's heart light, and take to hard study under Jacob Bowden, in the back parlour at home.

Monday week came round. Mr. Myers, who was a poor man, with fifteen in family, reluctantly accepted my resignation. Mr. Bowden procured me a few new books, and made shift with the rest of the old ones. I took my place on one side of

the table in the back parlour, and Mr. Bowden sat opposite me, graver than a judge.

I certainly made a little progress under his tuition, for there was nothing to distract my thoughts from Murray, Goldsmith, Pinnock, and Dilworth. There was no Mr. Myers to drop off to sleep with his head on the desk and his long hair in the inkstand—no chance of “making faces” at him when his eyes were closed to the daylight; no Tom Arrow at my side to play odd and even with under the cover of my copy-book; no sly nudges with the elbow, quiet practical jokes with the next form, or sudden bursts of laughter, muffled by mouthfuls of pinafore and pocket-handkerchief. It was all dull, cold, and business-like—even the sun did not shine on the back of the house till three in the afternoon—it was very depressing to the spirits!

I believe that I should have gone into a melaucholy-mad sort of way, had it not been for the want of regularity in the prosecution of my studies. Mr. Bowden, fortunately for me, had many duties to perform; he was partial to preaching at all times and seasons; ministers of other little chapels of the Methodist persuasion occasionally solicited his assistance; he had sometimes a call to an open-air discourse in a distant village; he had a round of poor bed-ridden people to console twice a-week, and he went on *that* beat every Monday and Thursday morning with the punctuality of a policeman. Of course, Mr. Bowden set me long tasks during his absence, and of course I knew little concerning them when he returned from his professional labours. He was a hard-hearted man, for he limited me to one half-holiday a-week—Saturday afternoon—and that he expected me to spend in reading some wretched tracts without an anecdote or a picture in them. Sometimes I had a friend to keep me company on those half-holidays—sometimes I went on Nettle-ton Common with my cricket-bat, and played with Tom Arrow and my old companions. But Mr. Bowden, with all his teaching, made me neither pious nor docile; the iron curb was drawn too tight, and I was chafing at the restraint imposed upon my liberty. For fourteen years of my life I had had my own way; in the fifteenth, it was to be attempted, suddenly and unceremoniously, to deprive me of free action. It was a mistake, and like all mistakes, it led to trouble.

I became more cunning—more full of plausible excuses to get out of doors; more sullen in my nature. I began to think

Methodism a bore, Methodists a selfish, inconsiderate class, and the chapel on the hill a dreary place of penance. Mr Bowden was always religious, always a minister; and as continual preaching never worked any good in this world yet, so it was to be expected that it did harm to a stubborn nature like my own.

My mother strove to account for my brooding fits after her own fashion—she who was happier than she had ever been in her life. She thought that I was improving in education, and getting of a serious turn of mind; was secretly glad I did not spend so much time with the idle young scamps of Nettleton, and was even building up a hope of seeing me a Methodist minister *some day*, and beating the dust out of a pulpit-cushion in the Bowden style. I did not think so, however; I thought more of the Miss Bowden, who never came to see her father, who had been also under his tuition for many years, and had turned out a poor specimen of his moral training. I began in my heart to dislike Mr. Bowden, to look upon him as the bar between me and my freedom, the clog-weight on everything I wished to do. Still, I said nothing. I had promised my mother to do my best; and though I had never learned the lesson of forbearance, I did it, nor uttered one complaint. The time came at last though.—It is not long before a storm when there is never a break in the sky!

One evening Mr. Bowden was absent on an important preaching mission, and was not expected home, to my extreme satisfaction, till ten o'clock at night. He had set me a vast quantity of syntax, and a column of principal rivers and mountains to learn, and had hinted that if there were any time to spare after the completion of my lessons, it might be profitably devoted to a small theme on "Religious education, its advantages, and its effects on society."

Mr. Bowden had departed at five o'clock in the afternoon, and I had completed syntax and principal rivers at four and a-half minutes past five.

"*Done* your lessons!" exclaimed my mother, when I had informed her of my neat and prompt despatch of business.

"Yes—all of them," said I, confidently.

"And your theme?"

"Well, I haven't quite finished that, mother," I replied; "I thought I'd just polish off the last line or two in the evening. I'm going out now, for a little while."

My mother had not the heart to offer opposition, so I put on my cap and ran out of doors to fetch Tom Arrow.

Tom Arrow was at home and ready to go anywhere, and as his father and mother seldom thwarted him in anything, he left home without a dissentient voice, and accompanied me to Nettleton Common, where we found a host of friends ready to receive us.

At half-past seven, when it was too dark for further sports and pastimes, my companions, with the exception of Arrow, went their separate ways.

"Are you going home, Bob?" asked Tom of me.

"My mother don't like me out after dark now," I answered, "so I suppose I must be off."

"Where's the parson to-night?"

"Gone preaching somewhere."

"What time do you expect him home?"

"Not till ten o'clock."

"Then I'll come home with you, Bob," said Arrow, "and we'll have out your old stage and play the 'Miller and his Men,' and make a jolly night of it."

I was perfectly agreeable, and Tom Arrow went home with me accordingly.

My mother looked surprised to see Master Arrow, but when he said "Good-evening, Mrs. Bowden," and took off his cap in the most polite manner, she smiled on him, returned his good-evening, asked after his father, mother, and grandmother—more about Tom Arrow's grandmother presently—invited him into the parlour, and bidding us both be good boys and not make too much noise, as her head ached, left us to ourselves.

Now my old stage, which Tom Arrow desired to witness, had not seen light since my mother's marriage. It was a small skeleton piece of carpentry, with a pasteboard proscenium—twopence plain, and fourpence coloured—and had a real green-baize curtain, which went up and down like life.

To this stage belonged a variety of scenes and characters, the collection of many juvenile years; a collection begun when my father—who was not a Methodist—was living, and allowed to increase by my easy mother, who waived all scruples concerning it for my sake. Many a time in the past had that stage been an amusement to Tom Arrow and my boy friends, until Mr Bowden's arrival in Nettleton had been the signal for its consignment to the early grave of a lumber-cupboard.

Thinking that Mrs. Jacob Bowden might have an objection

to urge in the present case, I stole up stairs in a burglarious manner, went into my room, opened the door of the great cupboard at the side of the bed, disinterred my dusty theatre and box of characters, and slipped silently down stairs with them.

The candle being lighted—we mourned the loss of our little oil-lamps, that looked so nice and made such a nasty smell!—and the fire in the parlour being stirred, we prepared to make ourselves comfortable. There was no probability of my mother intruding upon us for the next two hours, and as Mr. Bowden was not expected home till ten o'clock at night, the "Miller and his Men" could be exhibited with impunity.

It was a performance under difficulties, for many of the characters were missing, some of the scenery did not act, Count Friburgh would not stand up, Grindoff had only one leg, and Claudine's head was off. Still it was like old times to have the stage on the back parlour table again, and Tom Arrow was an indulgent audience, and said "bravo" to everything. I had lost the play-book, so it was an extempore performance, and those parts of the dialogue which I did not know, Tom did, and delivered for me in front, in a deep bass voice for Grindoff, and a shrill falsetto for Claudine. Taking it altogether, we got through the "Miller and his Men" in creditable style, and the blow-up of the mill in the last act was performed twice at the special request of the whole "house."

Alas! during the second representation of the burning mill, with new and startling effects, produced by dropping pieces of lighted paper through the top of the stage, the well known "*Rap, rap, RAP*" roused the echoes of the establishment.

Tom Arrow and I stared at each other aghast.

"Is that the parson?" cried Tom, leaping to his feet, and looking round for his cap.

"Yes—don't run away—lend a hand here—open that window!"

I caught up the stage, its scenes and characters in one heap, and Tom Arrow rushed to the window.

"It's fastened."

"Unfasten it then, there's a good fellow. Look alive!"

The street door opened, and the heavy tread of my step-father was distinctly heard in the passage. Tom made a last frantic effort with the fastening, stumbled over a chair, fell against the window, and put each of his elbows through a pane of glass, in the most clumsy manner.

"Oh ! Tom," cried I, in a voice of despair ; "you've done it !"

"By George, haven't I ?" responded Tom, giving vent to a long and dismal whistle, like the wail of a Banshee.

The crash of glass had alarmed my mother and accelerated the pace of Mr. Bowden, for at the same time both my parents hurriedly entered the parlour.

"Robert, my dear !" from my mother, and "Robert, Sir, what is the meaning of this ?" from my father.

"If you please, I've broken a window—two windows," said Tom, first recovering his voice. "I'm very sorry—it wasn't Bob's fault—and my father'll pay for it, Sir, or send a glazier in the morning."

Mr. Bowden glanced from the speaker to the two jagged holes in the glass, and scowled ferociously.

"I think you had better go home, Master Arrow."

"Yes, Sir," responded Tom, looking round for his cap a second time ; "of course, I don't want to stop any longer, Mr. Bowden. I'm very sorry I broke the windows, and—I don't see my cap anywhere !"

Mr. Bowden's eyes turned to his step-son.

"What have you there, Robert ?"

"My stage," I answered moodily.

"Your WHAT ?"

"Stage," I repeated.

"Great Heaven !" exclaimed Mr. Bowden, in his most violent manner ; "is it possible that you have had such a toy of the devil's in the house, and I in ignorance ! A stage !—a likeness of those evil places that corrupt all that is good and worthy, that represent and seek to palliate the grossest sins of which mankind is capable. Oh ! Mrs. Bowden," turning to my mother, "you do not know anything of this, I hope ?"

"I knew Robert had—had a little stage once," stammered my mother, as confused as any of us ; "but I thought that he had given up such folly."

"Such wickedness, Sarah," he shouted, "such a snare of the evil one for his soul. Give it me, give it me, give it me !"

He made a rush at the heap of heterogeneous matter in my arms, tore it from me, and dashed it on the fire. I made a spring towards it, but his strong hand caught me by the shoulder, and held me at arm's length.

"Stop, Robert—it is for your good. Keep still."

"For my good !" I cried, exploding at last ; "everything

seems for my good that makes me miserable. Let me come by! You have no right to burn what my own father gave me!"

My mother burst into tears.

"Oh! Robert, Robert, don't be foolish!"

"I exerted all my boyish strength, and Mr. Bowden had a difficulty in holding me.

The stage had begun to blaze when Tom Arrow, whose round little black eyes had been observing everything, suddenly gave a wild cry, and darted round the table towards the fireplace. Mr. Bowden, suspecting a conspiracy, put out his disengaged arm, and stopped him.

"You young reptile!" he exclaimed, panting for breath.

Tom's politeness to his senior had entirely departed; he kicked and struggled vehemently.

"Let me go—don't call me a reptile," vociferated Tom; "just take your hands off, now! Though you are a parson, *you're not going to burn my cap*, and that's all about it!"

"Your cap!" cried my step-father, releasing his hold of Tom, who rushed to the fire, tore out his cap,—which in my embarrassment at Mr. Bowden's unexpected return I had caught up with the stage and characters,—and sent a shower of little blazing bits of wood over the rug and carpet.

My mother began wringing her hands.

"We shall have the house in flames! Oh! dear, we shall all be on fire in a minute."

The stage burned furiously, and the scenes and characters blazed away also, and made a great bonfire. However, the house did not catch fire, though the chimney did, and a terrible roaring noise it made, and a terrible smell of soot followed.

Mr. Bowden released his grasp, directed his attention from me to the chimney, went down on his knees and raked away like a madman with the poker. But though he extinguished the fire in the grate, he could not get up the chimney and put the fire out there, and my mother's alarm was increasing every instant.

I stood where Mr. Bowden had left me, regarding the confusion with inward satisfaction, regarding Mr. Bowden also with glances not the most affectionate.

The room was filling with smoke, my mother was running from one corner to another, praying and weeping; Mr. Bowden was calling for water, and salt, and a long broom, and a hundred other things considered of use in cases of like

emergency, and the servant girl was tearing up stairs with the articles demanded. Tom Arrow had disappeared in the confusion, was probably at home by that time, relating the incidents of the evening to his relations.

The chimney continued blazing away—it had not been swept for twelve months at least, and there was a great deal of soot to burn—and Mr. Bowden's efforts were entirely futile; in fact, he had lost his presence of mind in the confusion, and my mother's alarm did not tend to restore it.

"Can't *you* do something?" cried Mr. Bowden, turning round to me with blood-shot eyes and a perfectly black face; "you are the cause of all this mischief—why do you not make yourself useful?"

"I'm not the cause."

"Don't bandy words with me," he said passionately; "leave the room! Sarah, my dear," turning to my mother, "don't be alarmed—pray be a little calmer—look at me! It's only the chimney—what a frightful noise it makes—there's not the slightest danger! I'm only thinking of the expense if they bring the parish engine here. I shall have it out in a minute;" and away he went to work with the long broom again.

But it was not out in a minute, it continued to burn and afford amusement to the Nettleton townsfolk, who had turned out in a body to witness the spectacle and speculate on the sparks falling on some thatched cottages in the rear, on the distress of mind of the Methodist family, on the disgraceful tardiness of the parish authorities, who had lost the hose, mislaid the keys of the engine-shed, and could not find the beadle anywhere. The chimney flared on quietly, and the neighbours stood in a row on the other side of the way, gaping up at it; whilst a few of our Methodist flock knocked at the door at irregular intervals, and offered valuable advice, to which no one paid any attention.

The fire was extinguished at last by enterprising people, who got on the roof of the house and poured several pails of water down the chimney, down all the chimneys in fact, front parlour, the sitting-room up stairs, and every bed-room in the house, and a beautiful mess they made of it, not to speak of the damage done to the fire-irons, hearth-rugs, and carpets. Still the fire was put out, and very thankful my mother was for it; and very cross with the world, with me, and himself, was Mr. Bowden.

Mr. Bowden did not bestow another word upon me that evening, did not even ask after my lessons, or my theme on "Religious education and its effects on society." He was even out of temper with my mother for not being cool and collected, and went finally up to bed, shaking his head at all mention of supper, and deigning no reply to his helpmate, who called after him "that there was a box of Grook's pills on the mantelpiece!"

CHAPTER II.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

My pious and estimable step-father was a trifle more severe in his treatment towards me after the memorable evening recorded in the last chapter. Men cast in a softer mould would have changed their tactics, adopted a less rigorous course, and tried the art of gentleness, but Mr. Bowden, who was partial to his own theories, drew the reins of discipline a little tighter, and set a veto on everything I wished. The shadow of his presence seemed to fall upon my heart, my every thought, my home, and all that in old time had helped to make home happy. I grew more hardened, obstinate, and sullen; I learned my lessons with an ill-grace, I chafed at my restraint, and a secret hate of the Methodist minister began to grow upon me. I made no effort to check it; one earnest appeal, one thorough explanation might have avoided much of evil, but I let the opportunity go by for ever.

My mother was a poor observer; happy herself, and attached to her second husband, she could detect no signs of unhappiness in me. She was glad to see me becoming a quiet boy, even thanked Mr. Bowden for the change; and when I was unusually dull, she thought my system was a little disarranged, and offered me the eternal Grook's pills to rectify it.

I might occupy the remainder of this book by giving the details of the long sermon delivered to me by Mr. Bowden on the morning after his act of incendiarism. There was a text, the discourse was divided into a proper number of heads, and occupied the entire morning. It was all about wilfulness, indifference, and a wicked abuse of time, and was, on the whole,

very like the condemned sermon with which they favour criminals at Newgate.

My mother was extremely affected ; she cried and rocked herself in the chair, and shook her head gravely at me every five minutes ; I sat opposite my step-father, with my hands in my pockets, and my eyes fixed on his countenance—a position I maintained till the exhortation was ended.

I made no reply, expressed no contrition for performing the “Miller and his Men” and asking Tom Arrow in to see it, but turned to my lessons in an apathetic manner. My mother thought my feelings were too deep for utterance after so earnest an oration, and she was perfectly right.

Tom Arrow’s grandmother called later in the day, and fortunately for Mr. Bowden found my step-father absent. That elderly female arrived in a towering passion, and fully prepared to exchange any amount of personalities with anybody who felt inclined to indulge in that amusement. Tom Arrow’s grandmother was the terror of Nettleton. She was a tall bony old woman, who always wore a mob cap of the washerwoman pattern, and was inclined to walk about the town with her sleeves tucked up to her elbows, and her bonnet perched, after an extraordinary fashion of her own, on the top of her head. She was no credit to a respectable chemist ; but then, she was Mrs. Arrow’s mother, and had three thousand pounds in the three-per-cents.,—a fact of which she informed her friends half-a-dozen times a day. She had been the wife of a respectable master-butcher, whom she had worried to death some twenty years previously. She was a cross-grained, ignorant, atheistical old woman, who had a strong antipathy to churches and church-going people, who was anxious to quarrel with everybody in Nettleton, and who made the home of the Arrows a most uncomfortable residence. Tom Arrow was the only object of her affection, the only one who could obtain a civil word from her, and Tom Arrow, of course, was to have the three thousand pounds in the three-per-cents. when the old lady died—an event for which everybody was anxiously waiting.

“There’s your money, Marm, for your rubbishing windows,” she cried, banging down four shillings on the table when she was shown into the room where my mother and I were seated—“and I should like to know where Mr. Bowden is ?”

“He’s not at home, Mrs. Sanders.”

“Of course he isn’t when I want to see him,” said the old lady, ironically, “and of course he wouldn’t be if I called a

dozen times. Your parsons are always afraid of seeing people, the mean-spirited fellows. I wish I had him here ! ”

“ Do you want him particularly ? ” meekly inquired my mother.

“ I want to know, Marm, what business he had to shake my grandson last night—the great big coward !—and what he meant by putting Tom’s cap on the fire, and calling him a reprobary something—he a minister ! ” with a disparaging elevation of her nose.

My mother continued her needlework not at all put out by the excited manner of Mrs. Sanders, who, finding her objurgations and violent gesticulations expended on empty air, concluded by informing my mother “ she was a poor weak-minded creature, and she might tell her psalm-smiting husband so,” marched out of the room and nearly shook the house down by slamming the street door after her.

When Mr. Bowden was informed of the lady who had been inquiring for him, and of her eccentric behaviour towards my mother, he turned to me with the old cry :—

“ This is your fault, Robert ! You see how one bad action leads to your own disgrace, to my shame, and to your mother being insulted under her own roof.”

I made no answer.

“ I must forbid your further acquaintance with that boy Arrow,” he said. “ He is an evil-disposed youth.”

“ No, he is not.”

“ I say he is,” reiterated Mr. Bowden, with some emphasis ; “ and I say that this habit of flat contradiction is unseemly and disgraceful.”

And Mr. Bowden left the room in high dudgeon.

This game at cross purposes continued all the spring and summer—lasted till the autumn came. Mr. Bowden devoted his spare time to my education, studied my moral welfare, did what he thought his duty earnestly, but my ungracious manners, my unthankfulness, did not win upon his heart, and there was no love lost between us. There was this difference, however : he wished me well, I wished him harm.

More than once mother and son have stood side by side and watched the head of the family go forth to his labours, one praying for his safety, and the other wishing that evil might befall him on his journey. Well for us all that we know not the thoughts of our friends and our neighbours !

In the beginning of the autumn it was customary to hold a

fair on Nettleton Common. Nettleton Fair was the one grand event of the year in our county, a rare holiday that was looked forward to for months, and talked of for months afterwards. It was a fair well supported by the gentry in the neighbourhood, by the inhabitants of every village within a fifteen miles' circuit, by the sober elders of Nettleton itself. It was a red-letter day from which people dated their joys and sorrows and extraordinary occurrences—village children were born so many weeks after Nettleton Fair, or village gaffers died so many days before the same, or people came into little fortunes, or broke their legs, or were taken up for poaching at stated intervals of time prior or subsequent to the great fair time on the common. It lasted three days, and, if the weather proved favourable, drew a large number of people together. The amusements were harmless enough, the country sports were good for the health, and the kiss in the ring which always celebrated those festivities was not a very disgraceful exhibition, at least the young people did not think so. Nettleton Fair was too great a distance from London to draw any wild characters, suspicious-looking idlers, or light-fingered gentry together; there was a gathering of honest English peasants and their laughing wives and daughters, a few sturdy farmers and Nettleton squires, and just a sprinkling of indigenious "roughs."

Mr. Bowden, of course, had his objections to Nettleton Fair; it was a place of sin, an abomination in the eyes of the godly, a gathering together of the weak, the vain, and the abandoned, a temptation to idleness, and full of every kind of debauchery. For one fortnight before Nettleton Fair, Mr. Bowden regularly entertained me and my mother at tea-time with anathemas at the coming festivities. My mother listened and approved of every one of his expressions, and hoped that I would not want to go that year—"I was a big boy now, and should consider myself above such things!"

When the dusty caravans began to arrive on the common, and an army of nomadic tribes to encamp there, I found voice to express a desire to attend the fair as usual.

Mr. Bowden's feelings were hurt, for the fortnight's lectures on the profanity of fair time had been intended especially for me.

"To go to the fair!" he exclaimed, flinging up both hands.

"Oh! Robert, dear," sighed my mother.

"I have been every year since we have lived in Nettleton.

You took me yourself last year, mother, when Mr. Bowden was our lodger. You thought there was no harm in it then."

"Yes, dear," replied my mother, coughing faintly to hide her embarrassment; "but you were younger then—and—and I did not see all the evil in fairs which your father has kindly pointed out."

"My father," I muttered to myself.

I had never called Mr. Bowden "father" since his marriage, despite my mother's wish to that effect. The word would have choked me in the attempt. *My* father had loved me with his whole heart, and thought nothing too good for me; I could not call his very antithesis by a similar name.

"Your mother, I fear, Robert, waived her own reluctance to oblige you," said Mr. Bowden, "and your mother was in fault. She will know better this time."

"I can go by myself."

"Robert!" whispered my mother.

"I will be home before dark."

Mr. Bowden began to clear his throat, and I to double my fists under the table, and look daggers at my reflection in the tea-pot.

"Robert, lad," said my step-father in a milder tone than I had anticipated, "will you believe for once that your mother and I are not anxious to aggravate you by an unfair opposition to your wishes? Come, boy, don't look black, give in for once with a good grace! You have seen the fair many times, I dare say, and so there is no novelty to tempt you. There's an end to it. We will say no more of the evils or dangers in the way; we will drop the subject."

This appeal, frankly made as it was, might have had its effect nine months ago; but now that I had become hardened by eternal opposition, had made up my mind to go, and had even promised Tom Arrow, whose acquaintance with me had been interdicted, to meet him at the round pond on the common in the afternoon of the first day, it was too hard upon me, and I could not give in, even to my best friends.

"I have not been anywhere this summer," I remonstrated, "have hardly had a single holiday—I shall go."

"You shall not go," cried Mr. Bowden, losing patience. "I expressly forbid it, you wilful and disobedient boy. If you fly in the face of my strict commands, you have but yourself to thank for the result."

And Mr. Bowden, thinking the effect of his injunctions might be weakened by a longer stay, rose from the tea-table and went into the garden.

My mother wistfully regarded me as I sat with lips compressed staring at the distorted image of bottled indignation in the teapot. It was several minutes before either of us spoke, and the Dutch clock in the corner ticked away noisily.

"Robert, my dear boy," said my mother at last in a faint voice, "you will not think of going now?"

"Yes."

"You will not go?"

"Yes, I will."

"For my sake. You will make me very unhappy!"

My lip quivered. I wanted to cry, to burst forth into a passionate fit of weeping, cursing, and reproaching; but I struggled with myself, and kept my passions down.

"Think of the harm it may do. Of the offence it may give your father."

"Don't call him my father!"

"He *would* be a father to you, Robert."

"I will never let him!" I retorted, bitterly.

"You will please *me*, then, by not going."

"Mother, I *WILL* go—I have been thwarted long enough. Let him do his worst, I'll go! If I knew that I was to die for it, he should not stop me!"

I jumped up from my chair, flung the tea-cup at the slop-basin, cracked them both, and paced the room with heavy tread.

"It's the old song, 'for my good,' and I have stood that goodness long enough. Mother, I will have no more of it!"

My mother tried to pacify me, to assure me of everybody's good intentions, to beg me to be calm before Mr. Bowden's return, crying and clasping her hands meanwhile.

I calmed down at her request, but to all her solicitations to change my mind and be a good boy I shook my head in stern dissent. Mr. Bowden returned; the tea things were carried down stairs; my mother began her needlework; and I commenced learning my lessons for the morrow.

The days passed on, and the fair day came at length. No more had been said concerning Mr. Bowden's interdict; my mother thought that time had softened my obduracy, and my step-father did not believe in my hardihood to break forth into open defiance.

What a fine sunshiny day it was, what a blue sky to be free under, and have no Methodist minister to plague me ! Not a word was spoken concerning the fair, though it was the uppermost thought in each of our minds. The gay streamers were flying from the roofs of tents and shows, there was extra bustle in the roadway outside my mother's house, the noise of children talking, the sounds of country carts jolting past the door, the strains of far-off music, the ring of holiday-folks' laughter on the common.

I sat at my lessons in the back parlour, with Mr. Bowden before me, writing. When he had finished his letters, and had retired from the room, I darted into the front parlour, and looked through the window at Nettleton Common. The people were not flocking thither in great numbers yet ; it was early, and the Nettleton tradesmen had their morning's orders to attend to. Still, a country cart or a farmer's waggon, filled with spruce country lads and lasses, passed every two minutes, and the happiness on the faces of the rustics made me envious. I looked across the common at the tents three-quarters of a mile off. It was a large fair ; there were more booths than ever, and as for the herds of sheep and bullocks—for the first day—was also a cattle fair—they were grouped in all directions.

I was back in my place before Mr. Bowden returned to hear my lessons, which I rehearsed to his satisfaction, for he said, "Very well done, Robert"—a compliment that did not cheer me up in the least. At our early dinner, still no mention of the fair, although the horses and carts were passing the door rapidly, and the Bell Inn was in a state of siege. Mr. Bowden talked of everything but the fair—of the weather in general, of the present fine day in particular, of my educational progress, of the fine harvest we had had, of the housekeeping, of the state of Methodism in Nettleton, of his last sermon, of his next one. I ate my dinner sullenly enough, keeping one eye on the clock in the corner, the hour hand of which was nearing figure two. Tom Arrow was to meet me at the round pond at two o'clock, he was on his way there then ; how the time was flying onward, and the precious minutes drifting by !

A single heavy knock at the door. My heart rose in my throat. Had Tom Arrow, with the coolest effrontery, ventured to call for me ?

The small servant entered the room.

"If you please, Sir, here's Harris, from the Shrubberies, at Westock."

Mr. Bowden sprang from his seat and left the room. I could hear his voice in the passage saying :—

“Well, Harris, what is it?”

(Harris and his family were humble members of Nettleton Chapel.)

“The old lady’s worse, Sir. She seems anxious like to see you, if so be as you can manage to coom, Measter.”

“Certainly. I’ll come directly.”

Mr. Bowden re-entered the room. My heart felt lighter. Here was a chance of going to Nettleton Fair without my worthy step-father’s knowledge. Westock was four miles distant, and he could not possibly go there, comfort the old lady—I prayed fervently the comfort would last a long while—and return, in less time than three hours.

“Poor Dame Harris is worse, Sarah. I must go and see her directly.”

“Poor old lady,” said my sympathising mother.

Mr. Bowden’s eyes rested on me. A bright thought seemed to flash upon him.

“I think I will take Robert. It’s a beautiful day, and the walk will do him good.”

“It is a pity to lose such fine weather,” assented my mother.

“Robert, go up stairs and wash your face; your father is kind enough to offer to take you with him.”

It was no use remonstrating—they were playing one game, I another—the last move was to decide it. I went out of the room, stole down stairs instead of up stairs, and entered the front kitchen.

No one about; the servant maid in the back kitchen, scrubbing something vigorously and hissing like an ostler; my cap handy on the dresser, the window open, the sun shining outside, the people going to the fair!

Is it not David Garrick, in the old print, who hesitates between Tragedy and Comedy, uncertain which to choose; led by Melpomene the stately, yet lingering still with laughing Thalia?

As with David Garrick the Immortal, so with Robert Woodleigh the Erring; Tragedy, in the shape of Mr. Bowden in his black garments, sought to lead me one way; Thalia, with her short robe fluttering in the autumn wind, frolicked on Nettleton Common, and beckoned me to disobedience.

Light-hearted youth, with his veins full of life, cares not

for Tragedy—time enough when the pulse beats feebly for the dagger and bowl, the dreary five acts of existence, with a death always at the end of them! Comedy is for the spring-time, when care sits lightly on the shoulders, and folly smiles and tempts us.

A little struggle with my conscience, a little thought for the result, a little headstrong will of mine resisting Prudence and garotting her, and then I crept through the window after Comedy, and left Tragedy fidgeting in the back parlour, and wondering what detained me.



CHAPTER III.

NETTLETON FAIR

I FOUND Tom Arrow at the extreme edge of the round pond, pitching stones into the water in a disconsolate manner. His face brightened up when I arrived, rather short of breath.

"So you have come, Bob," was his first salutation. "I'm so glad, old fellow. I thought the parson would not let you out. He's not a bad sort after all, is he, now?"

"I did not tell him I was coming to the fair. I took French leave, Tom, I could get no other."

Tom gave vent to his significant but dreary whistle.

"I'm sorry for that, though. You'll catch it when you get back, won't you?"

"He has never laid a hand upon me yet—he never shall but once."

"Well, here we are, Bob, and he can't hinder you seeing the fair, let him whack you ever so hard," said he; "let us be moving. There are some fine shows, I can tell you. There's a learned pig, and a spotted boy, and a woman without hands and feet, who cuts out watch-papers with her toes, and lots of other wonderful things—what's the matter?"

"I came out in a hurry—I forgot to go to my money-box—I——"

"Oh! never mind that," said Tom, with his usual indifference to money affairs, "my grandmother gave me a shilling

before I started, and here's half of it. Lay hold, there's a good chap."

"But——"

"But you can pay me to-morrow, you know. Come on."

We were soon in the thickest of Nettleton Fair, had soon run against other boys of the town, with whom we immediately fraternised. Nettleton Fair was filling with people; the gingerbread-dealers were driving a brisk trade; the shows had each its crowd of Hodges and Joans before the doors, and the proprietors were proclaiming loudly the merits of their entertainments, and slapping the large illustrative sheets of canvas with their canes; there were swings and roundabouts, and gipsy women telling fortunes; drinking-booths, filled with graziers, cattle-drivers, farmers, men and dogs; there were herds of oxen and sheep, pigs and calves; there was dancing to a fiddle on one part of the common, a jingling match in another, kiss in the ring in four places at once; there were sharp-sighted beggars, and beggars without sight at all, tumblers, Punch and Judy, a Cheap Jack, toys on sticks to be thrown at thrice for the small charge of one penny; everything, in fact, that Tom and I could wish for. Still, I did not enjoy the scene at first; the sense of my desertion from home marred my appreciation of the festivities, and my boy's heart was heavy. Fortunately the effect wore off; the crowds of country people in their Sunday's best, the attraction of the shows, the laughter and rough jesting, the excitement of the moment soon made me forgetful of the past, and careless of the future; I no longer looked nervously over my shoulder and thought of Mr. Bowden, I plunged into the sea of dissipation, the waters of oblivion flowed over my head, and my Methodist friends were forgotten.

Time passed rapidly enough; there were so many things to distract the attention, so many booths to see outside, and a few to visit inside—thanks to Tom Arrow's grandmother—that Nettleton Church-clock was striking six before the time came into my head at all.

"There's six o'clock, Tom," I said, as the home thoughts rushed back to me, and pictures of Mr. Bowden returning from Westock, of my mother standing at the front window looking anxiously across the common for the runaway, of Charlotte, the maid, making inquiries in the town concerning me, passed vividly before my mind's eye.

"I wouldn't go home now, Bob," said Tom.

"Why not?"

"You won't catch it any more for stopping an hour or two longer," said he, in a consoling manner; "and you may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb."

"A black sheep?"

"Ha, ha! black sheep, if you like—that's what Squire Heberdeen called you."

"It is a name that is likely to stick by me," I answered, "for I'm not much of a lamb, I'm afraid, Tom. Come on, boys," I cried recklessly to my companions, "I won't go home, there! Hurrah for a long night of it—let's come and see the Spotted Boy!"

We dashed into the heart of the fair again, and were soon pushing and fighting our way through the mob of idlers. It was growing dusk, the fair was beginning to illuminate, some of the most respectable people were retiring, some of the most disreputable were coming in. It was quite time for boys to be at their mothers' knees again, relating the day's wonders they had seen.

Seven o'clock striking, and a stir in Nettleton Fair. Squire Heberdeen and son had condescended to honour the scene with their presence, and there was nothing but bowing and scraping and touching of hats. Since that time I have had an opportunity of contrasting the respect paid to crowned heads in London with the homage bestowed on great men, lords of the manor, and so forth in the country, and the country magnates have the advantage. Every man who lives in a large house, who keeps his carriage, his pack of hounds and his hunters, is a king out of town, and has plenty of subjects to do him reverence.

Squire Heberdeen lounged through the fair with his round good-looking face all smiles, and Squire Heberdeen's son strutted by his side, rather more important than his father. Squire Heberdeen made purchases at some of the booths, and ordered them to be sent home in the course of the evening; and the little stall-keepers bustled about, ducked their heads and said "Yes, your honour," to everything.

Country people being always curious, there was a small knot of gaping rustics in attendance on the Squire and his son; and as Tom Arrow and my friends were as inquisitive as the rest, we helped to swell the humble *cortége* in the rear.

Master Heberdeen, who had caught sight of Arrow and me, and who, with a boy's vanity, was anxious to show off in our presence, made his purchases also, and invested money in a

fishing-rod, a box of paints, and a large wax doll. Tom winked at me when Master Heberdeen bought the doll, and said in a whisper:—

“That’s for his sister.”

“No, it is not, Tom.”

“For his sweetheart, perhaps?”

“No, for himself; don’t you see what a great girl he is!”

Tom burst into an outrageous roar of laughter, and Squire Heberdeen’s son turned round, purse in hand. There were some silver coins glittering through the net-work, but Master Heberdeen was anxious to display a real golden sovereign which he was holding between his finger and thumb ostentatiously.

“Don’t change your sovereign, Ned,” I heard the Squire say, as his son, looking Tom full in the face, asked, “What he was laughing at?”

“Nothing,” said Tom.

“Mayn’t he laugh, young stuck-up?” bawled a rough voice behind us, and at the same instant my companions and I experienced a heave forward, which brought us with a grand rush against the Squire, his son, the fancy-stall and its keeper.

The Squire rapped out a loud oath as he staggered against the counter and tilted it completely over, burying the owner under the *débris*; several heads were knocked together, Tom fell down on his face, and Squire Heberdeen’s son stumbled and dropped his sovereign.

“My sovereign, my sovereign!” he cried, pushing right and left, and looking about him anxiously.

“Stand back there—the young Squire has lost some money—stand farther back!” were a few of the exclamations heard amidst the confusion that ensued. But although we stood farther back, and looked for Master Heberdeen’s money, no sovereign was forthcoming; it had disappeared for ever.

“Perhaps it has rolled under the stall,” suggested a loutish-looking vagabond, with a gipsy cast of countenance.

“No, no—it rolled your way—I saw it.”

“Then it *must* be somewhere about,” said he, commencing a diligent search, thrusting the people aside, and even looking at the sole of each of his boots, under the delusion that it had got fixed between the variety of hobnails which embellished it. But the sovereign was not to be found, and Squire Heberdeen, who had lost his temper, told his son that he was a fool to bring so much money out with him.

“It’s all through these fellows,” the son said, pointing to our

group—"they're always insulting me. I believe one of them has it. I believe *you*"—infuriated at my contemptuous expression of countenance—"have it, if anybody has!"

I reddened. I felt my ears tingling and my hands forming themselves into tight little balls.

"See how he colours, pa—look at him—he has got it!"

"You're a liar, Ned Heberdeen!" I shouted, "and if you say I'm a thief again, I'll knock you down. I'm not frightened of you, or any one like you, because you live in a great house and have a rich father. Don't say I stole your money!"

And like a small fury as I was, I marched close to his side and looked him in the face. He set his teeth and glared at me—he doubled his fists, too, and stood his ground courageously.

"Stand back, you young hound—you are always in mischief!" roared the Squire, giving me a thrust with his great hand that sent me staggering into the midst of the crowd. I was breathing hard, and making ready for a rush at Squire Heberdeen's legs, when another hand forced itself down my jacket, and four bony knuckles inserted themselves in the back of my neck.

"Come home, Sir!"

I recognised the voice directly—the deep harsh voice of my step-father, I knew it was he, though I could only catch a glimpse from the corner of my left eye of a black coat sleeve.

"I have been looking for you the last hour, Sir!" said my step-father, sternly.

"Take him home, parson," cried the Squire, "and thrash him soundly. He is the plague of all Nettleton."

"Squire Heberdeen need not prompt me in my duty," said Mr. Bowden. "I am sufficiently acquainted with it."

"Why don't you take more care of him, then? If he had been a son of mine, I would have flogged the wickedness out of him long ago."

"You have a son of your own, Sir, to bring up," said Mr. Bowden, loftily; "from all reports, not the most amiable or docile. The education of that son is your task—you have no right to interfere with mine."

"Do you taunt me, Mr. Methodist?" said the Squire, with a laugh.

"I do not taunt you—I do not desire further discussion with you."

Mr. Bowden turned his back on Squire Heberdeen and prepared to lead me homewards. Squire Heberdeen, who was

nettled at my step-father's coolness, said something in a light tone concerning "canting hypocrites," which elicited a loud laugh from the majority of people near him. Mr. Bowden faced the Squire once more.

"Squire Heberdeen, since I have been in Nettleton I have heard much in your favour, witnessed, myself, the result of many acts of kindness. I have learned something more to-day."

"What's that?" he asked.

"That a man may earn a good name in the town, and occupy a high position in the county, and yet be as deficient in all gentlemanly courtesy as the most ignorant clodpoll at his side."

Squire Heberdeen turned scarlet in the face as my step-father led me away, but he hazarded no reply to the reproof; the Methodist parson was a sharper man than he had anticipated, and Squire Heberdeen was not a wit of the first water.

Retaining his hold of my collar, Mr. Bowden, very erect and dignified, marched me ignominiously through the fair; Tom Arrow and his friends, desirous of seeing the last of me, following at a respectful distance. People stared at us as we passed through the avenue of booths, and speculated loudly as to the meaning of the procession. Those who came from a distance thought that I had stolen something, and that Mr. Bowden was a policeman in plain clothes; those to whom we were well known whispered, "It's the minister and his bad step-son—young Woodleigh, an idle scamp—a black sheep!"

CHAPTER IV

EXIT ROBERT.

MY mother was sitting in the back parlour, with her apron over her face, when we entered. I saw that her eyes were red and swollen with crying as she lowered her apron and shook her head reproachfully.

"Oh! Robert, Robert, how could you do it?"

"I have done no harm," I answered, sullenly.

"I found him in the midst of the riotous assembly, Sarah," said Mr. Bowden, releasing his hold for the first time; "quar-

relling with the son of Squire Heberdeen and challenging him to fight. Is it not time to try severe measures, now it has come to this ? ”

“ I fear it is,” moaned my mother ; “ oh ! my poor boy, to think, with all my love and care, that you should prove so wicked.”

“ Squire Heberdeen’s son told me that I was a thief. He said I stole his sovereign—the villain ! ”

“ And your defence was an attempt to strike him,” said Mr. Bowden ; “ did that make your innocence more apparent, think you ? ”

I did not answer.

“ Had I been Squire Heberdeen’s son I should have been inclined to believe you guilty by your very airs of insolent bravado.”

“ You would think any ill of me ! ”

“ Still sullen and ungracious,” said my step-father ; “ not one expression of regret for your deception, for your last flagrant act of disobedience ? Still full of the promptings of the evil one ? ”

“ Why is my life to be made miserable ? why is everything I do called wrong ? ”

“ Poor boy, poor boy,” said Mr. Bowden to himself, as he commenced pacing the room ; “ so young and yet so hardened ! Sarah, this behaviour must be checked.”

“ Oh ! dear me, yes,” murmured my mother.

Mr. Bowden stopped and turned to me again.

“ Robert, give me your cap.”

The cap was still on my head, and I gave it a defiant pull over my forehead, and scowled at him from under the peak.

“ What for ? ”

“ *Give—me—that—cap,*” said Mr. Bowden, slowly and firmly.

“ Give your father the cap directly, Robert,” said my mother, in sharper tones than she had ever used to me before.

“ Let him tell me what he wants with it.”

“ I will tell you,” said Mr. Bowden ; “ I want to keep it—to lock it in my desk. One fortnight you will remain in-doors, Sir, as a punishment for your wickedness of this afternoon ; after that period has expired, you may go out with me or your mother, but never by yourself alone, until we think you more deserving of our confidence. Give me the cap.”

He made a step towards me, and I made a step backwards, then we both came to a full stop again.

"Sarah," said he to my mother, "this must be a painful scene to you, and—ahem—you will be rather in the way, my dear, if I have to run round the table after him—had you not better go into the front parlour?"

"Give your father the cap, Robert."

I was growing more obstinate and more full of evil passions—even the fiery looks of Mr. Bowden did not terrify me.

"He shan't lock up my cap—he has no right."

"Robert," said Mr. Bowden, "my first intention this afternoon, after the discovery of your wilful disobedience, was to flog you soundly, but I have altered my determination. Your nature is a peculiar one, and a severe but just restraint will work upon you more, and bring forth, I trust, some better traits of character than have lately been exhibited. Something must be done, for you know not your best friends, and are ignorant of what is good for you."

"You cannot teach me to be good," I cried, "for you know nothing of my nature. You did not know what was best for your own daughter, for she turned against you long ago!"

Mr. Bowden started.

"Mrs. Bowden, pray retire."

My mother went out of the room. The strong man and the rebellious boy looked each other in the face.

"Give me the cap."

"Not to lock up," I muttered.

He advanced towards me, I backed towards the wall. He followed at a grave pace, I continued my retrograde movement close to the wall, behind the chairs, round the table, past the fire-place, back to the same spot again, Mr. Bowden keeping step.

Suddenly he made a rush, and I darted more quickly round the chairs, upsetting one, tumbling over another, gathering myself together again, and dodging round the table in a style that would have won the admiration of Tom Arrow. But Mr. Bowden was too quick for me, or his arms were too long, for one large hand fastened at last upon my cap, and on my hair within it, and the other fell upon my ears, right and left—right and left, with four tremendous thwacks that precipitated me on the hearth-rug.

Trembling in every limb, and mad with passion, I scrambled to my feet, rushed at the mantelpiece, and seizing thence the blue and yellow shepherdess, hurled it with all my force at

Mr. Bowden's head. He threw up the hand which held my cap, but it was too late; the stone-china shepherdess alighted on Mr. Bowden's nose and mouth, and nearly knocked him backwards.

There was an end to calmness after that; Mr. Bowden *could* lose his temper and forget his duties, he was not all philosophy. He made a second rush at me, caught me by the arm, and, as the blood streamed from his nose and mouth, and two out of his four bottom teeth slipped down his throat, he laid on to my head and ears with an abandonment which said little for his power of self-command.

I bore my punishment with a heroism that was worthy of a better cause; I neither cried nor begged for mercy; I stood and warded off the blows as well as I could with my arms, until an opportunity of escape presenting itself, I made a dash at the door, flung it open, and tore out of the room. Carried away by the excitement of the moment, Mr. Bowden offered chase, ran up four stairs after me, slipped on the fifth, and came down with his sore nose and mouth on the sharp corner of the stairs. I flew into my own room, double-locked the door, and, sinking into a chair before the dressing-table, stared at my flushed, rage-swollen face in the looking-glass. I succumbed to no fit of childish weeping when I was alone; my passion was too great, it seemed to have changed my nature, and made a demon of me.

I dashed my hand upon the dressing-table, and gave vent to all the evil wishes of the moment; wishes that the hand might wither which had struck me, that my step-father might die that night, or, if he did not, that a time might come for my revenge. There was a secret desire in my thoughts, also, to do something strange and awful, that should show Mr. Bowden and my mother how little I cared for their wishes, and how utterly I despised them.

I rose and paced the room, despite the pain the movement caused me; I flung myself on the floor with a crash, even opened the window and speculated on the sensation I should create by falling headlong from it; then I resumed my place before the glass, and stared at my worst enemy within it.

The twilight deepened in my room, the darkness fell around me, the hum of voices on Nettleton Common sounded in my ears—voices that were singing country ballads, laughing voices, voices whose very echo told of happiness. When the

stars came out, and all was black within the room, a rustling noise was heard without my door, and light fingers sounded on the panels.

I did not move from my position, and after a pause the tap was repeated, and my mother's soft voice whispered :—

“Robert !”

I held my peace. There was no power in my mother's gentle words to soften me.

“Robert, dear !”

No answer.

“Robert, will you come down and have some supper ?”

A long, long pause—my mother waiting patiently.

“Your father will not scold you any more to-night—will not touch you again, dear. Do answer me !”

Stern silence—at that moment I would not have uttered a word to save my life.

My mother, with a heavy sigh, went down stairs again, and all was still till Nettleton clock was striking ten.

At that hour Mr. Bowden, as well as my mother, came up stairs to my room door, and the tapping outside was repeated.

“Robert,” called my mother again.

“Robert, thir, I inthith upon a reply !” demanded Mr. Bowden in his harshest tones, but with a disjointed kind of lisp that was entirely new, and for which the blue and yellow shepherdess was answerable.

Mr. Bowden “inthithed” again, but no reply was deigned.

“Perhaps he is not there—perhaps he is ill. Perhaps he went down stairs after—*afterwards*. Oh ! Jacob, dear, if he has run away from home !”

Run away from home ! My hands clenched, my heart beat fast. Run away from home !—WHY NOT ?

What was home to me now ? I thought ;—a gaol, a prison-house wherein every harsh restraint was to be exercised—a place which I was never to leave for a moment without a watch upon me, and in which I had no friend, not even in my mother !

In my growing excitement I forgot my caution, and stamped with both my feet.

“He is there,” I heard my mother whisper ; “I heard him move.”

“Yeth—he ith thafe enough—I wath thertain of it.”

One more attempt to elicit a reply from me, and then my mother and her husband went down stairs to their room. An

hour longer in my old position, fostering strange thoughts within my mind—thoughts which my mother had suggested in her own anxiety.

To unfasten my door, steal down the dark stairs, open a door or window, pass through into the street, run away and be never heard of more! How they would repent then of their rigour; how the stern Methodist would reproach himself with over-strictness, with being the cause of his wife's unhappiness; torture himself with thinking of the wilful boy he had helped to cast upon the world!

Where should I go?—further into the country, get a place as farmer's boy under a disguised name, or join the gipsies in Nettleton Woods, and dye my hands and face with walnut juice? The last idea was an attractive one, but almost too romantic to be practicable; the gipsies would possibly rob me of my clothes, stow me away in a dismal hole or thicket, and cover me decently with leaves. Should I go to London, find out my uncle—he was my own father's brother, and no Methodist!—tell him the whole truth, and ask to be his errand boy?

London!—the great city where fortunes were made from small beginnings, and men without a penny rose to fame and wealth,—where my uncle was—my cousins; where my father had lived and died; where there were no Mr. Bowdens to box one's ears and make one's head ache; where they would never find me!

I crossed the room, took my money-box from the mantel-piece, and felt the weight of it. I had been saving lately; Mr. Bowden had taught me the necessity of saving. There were at least eight shillings and sixpence within the box, besides some coppers,—that sum would buy me a sixpenny cap in the next town, and take me to London in a third-class railway train, or in a waggon, or on the top of a stage-coach. London was only fifty miles away,—why, I could walk it in three days!

The stubbornness of my nature, the spirit of resistance, the satisfaction of making Mr. Bowden and my mother miserable, —was not my mother turning against me?—helped on these thoughts, and strengthened me.

Yes,—I would run away from home! When the hour was late, and all Nettleton asleep, I would steal from the house that I had learned to hate, and, by a circuitous route that should elude pursuit, proceed to London. Younger lads than I had been thrown upon their own resources, and worked their way upwards in the world,—why not Robert Woodleigh, a youth

not particularly sensitive, one who could stand the world's buffettings and not give way to despair in a hurry ?

I took off my boots, and walked cat-like about the room. I gathered, or rather groped, into a bundle my Sunday clothes, my three new shirts, two pairs of socks, my turn-down collars, the hair-brush, and a little flute of mine. I broke open my money-box and put its contents in my pocket, all except sixpence, which I wrapped in a piece of paper, and intended to slip under Tom Arrow's father's door.

Then, with my bundle on my knees, I sat down, and waited for a later hour.

Two o'clock striking from Nettleton Church ! With a trembling touch I opened noiselessly my door, and went upon the dark landing, my bundle in one hand, and my boots in the other. One moment of reflection, a slight sinking within me, a feeling of heart-sickness, then I crept down stairs.

Before the door of my mother's room—*their room*—and listening. The door was ajar—should I look in, or go away ?

I pushed the door open, and looked in. The night-lamp burning on the table ; Mr. Bowden snoring unmelodiously through his bruised nose, his back towards me, and his night-cap half off his head, in a tipsy manner ; my mother sleeping restlessly, dreaming, perhaps, of me and danger.

The tears rose to my eyes, and for the first time my stubborn will was shaken. I was going away without a word to that mother who loved me—her only boy—so dearly !

I paused on the threshold of that room, and dashed the drops from my eyes with an impetuous hand, and chid myself for cowardice. "I should be happier away," the tempter whispered ; "everybody was against me here !"

Well, then—good-bye ! God bless you, mother,—may you be happier without me,—I know you will not, still the wish goes for something ;—good-bye !

The clock on the staircase asked, "'Till when ?—'Till when ?"

'Till when, indeed ! 'Till I am settled in the great city--'till I am a man—'till death claims that gentle mother, and I come back, perhaps, into the same chamber, darkened as now, and look at her in her coffin ? God forbid that !

Down stairs—my boots on again—the street door opened softly—the moonlit street of the old town before me—the white tents of the fair gleaming in the distance. I hesitated to close the door behind me, lest the noise should startle the slumberers

and set pursuers on my track ;—still there might be rough characters about it—it was fair time—my mother might be robbed.

I drew the door to with a careful hand—the lock went easily—a click—the door closed ; and I was standing, bare-headed, in the free air, with my unknown road before me !

There was no map of life to guide me on my way,—no danger-signals to warn the wanderer where the pitfalls lurked, and where the snares,—no signs to show under which bright vapour lurked temptation,—along what stony paths were Honesty and Virtue to be met with.

The dark veil hung before me, and hid the good and evil, and my eyes were blinded as I set forth to seek my fortunes.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK III.

FORTUNE-SEEKING

“God give you morrow, Sir; lack you not a neat, handsome, and cleanly young lad, about the age of fifteen or sixteen years?”

GEORGE PEELE.

“A deep occult philosopher.”

BUTLER.

CHAPTER I.

A PHILOSOPHER.

IF this was the third canto of an epic poem it would be my duty to burst forth with a grand Ode to Liberty ; if a novel, it would be my fate to immediately fall into danger or among thieves—to rescue a distressed damsel, or be rescued myself from tyrants and persecutors ; to meet a flattering stranger, perhaps, as Gil Blas did at Pennaflor ; or an Artful Dodger, as Oliver Twist did at Barnet.

But, alas ! I am no hero of a story-book—there are no heroic qualities in me to make this veracious history romantic ; my character stares me in the face from the title-page of this book, and I cannot, as Landor says, “ Draw my robe round me, let the folds fall gracefully, and look majestic ! ”

This is a chronicle of faults, failings and shortcomings—a record of the good deeds of Robert Woodleigh would never fill three volumes.

I walked my twenty miles the first day, buying a cap in my progress, and sleeping in the evening at an out-of-the-way inn, where the charge for my accommodation was extremely reasonable. I was a big boy for my age, and no one suspected that I had run away from home—everybody believed my assertion that I was going to a new place in London, and that, being short of money, I preferred walking my way thither in an independent fashion. I went by a circuitous route, and eluded all pursuit. Before the sun shone on Nettleton, I had passed through all the villages wherein some one might have recognised me and set my step-father on my track. In the afternoon of the second day I came, with dusty clothes and with boots awfully down at heel, to the green banks of the winding Thames. Being tired with sixteen miles’ sharp walking, I sat down, placed my bundle at my side, and looked around me. It had been a fine day, too fine for a never-ending walk along a dusty road, with the sun upon me all the way, and a rest by the water-side, under the shade of a drooping willow, was a temptation not to be resisted. I looked at the sun, and thought it must be five o’clock at least ; I looked in a dreamy manner

at the clouds floating overhead ; I watched the waters rippling by, bound Londonwards, like me ; I stretched myself full length on the grass, and thought of Nettleton. Two days had cooled my temper to a certain extent. I thought more of my mother, and less of my own outraged dignity, although my ears seemed still tingling beneath the hard hands of Mr. Bowden. Poor mother ! still grieving I knew, for her undutiful son ; still refusing to be comforted by her new husband ; still hoping midst her sorrow that I would come back a penitent, and, by a new life, atone for all that had passed.

However, I had no desire to return to Nettleton, despite the uncertainty of the future, or the knowledge that in a day or two more I should be without a penny in my pocket. There was a sense of freedom that pleased me ; I was my own master, and had no one to dictate to me ; the world was all before me where to choose !

The very uncertainty of the coming events had its charm. "Better to be begging in the London streets," I thought, "than reciting lessons to my grim step-parent in that wretched parlour, which looked on the gooseberry bushes, the cabbages and water butt. There was my uncle to stretch forth a helping hand, to take me home, perhaps, and adopt me. He was not a bad uncle in old time ; he never saw me without giving me a shilling, and he and my father always agreed very well together."

Thinking of the future and the past, with the sun sinking in the west ; the clouds—fair type of life's chances—floating by, light clouds and dark clouds following one another and drifting fast away ; with the river flowing on towards the world of London ; the birds singing in the trees, or flitting by me quicker than my thoughts ; the insects in their own little troubled world passing and repassing at my side, some of them running away from home !

Future and past still before me, but getting more confused ; Mr. Bowden, in some mysterious manner, identified with Uncle Woodleigh ; the clouds above receding from me, and everything becoming misty ; Robert Woodleigh, with one arm supporting his head, nodding drowsily over his bundle, and travelling on to dream-land.

* * * * *

"Ahem ! young man, do you mean to sleep there all night ?"

I sat up, opened my eyes, rubbed them, and stared hard at my questioner. I had certainly been asleep; the sun was lower in the heavens, the shadows of the trees were longer on the grass, and the gentleman before me, who had evidently been making a sketch of me in his note-book, was not there when I lost all consciousness of present things.

He was a tall, spare man, whose long grey moustache and small bright eyes struck me at first sight. He seemed a gentleman, too, although his boots were thick, his coat well worn, and his hat decidedly shabby. He was a man who might have been anything between thirty-five and fifty years of age, and the lines upon his face were very deeply marked.

"What time is it, Sir?"

He took an old silver watch from his waistcoat pocket, replaced it, and informed me that it was a quarter-past six.

"How far am I from London now?"

"About five-and-thirty miles," he replied, shutting up his note-book.

"Heigho! I'm sorry it's so far as that."

"Have you been walking much to-day, friend?" he asked, with a glance at my well-worn boots.

"Fifteen miles."

"Fair walking for one so young," said he, attentively regarding me, "but a walk that seems to have taken the spirit out of you. You look done up."

"Oh, no!" said I, rising to my feet and tucking my bundle under my arm—"I am not easily done up, Sir."

"You are from the country, of course."

"Why of course?" I asked.

"We Londoners don't see many pairs of rosy cheeks in the great city, don't hear very often that country burr—the English brogue as it were—twelve miles round St. Paul's. Have you come from Buckinghamshire?"

"That way," I answered, evasively.

"Ah! that way," with another sharp look in my direction; "very properly answered, young gentleman. Never be too communicative with roadside stragglers, lest you fall into mischief, or into the hands of the spoiler. You are very young to come tramping up to London without a soul to take care of you. Not fifteen years of age yet, I guess?"

"Fifteen next month."

We were walking side by side along the country road, glancing curiously at each other, and becoming, I believe,

rather interested in each other. It was a relief to get some one to converse with, and especially some one who came from London, and could enlighten me on many points of which I was ignorant.

"An early age to begin the world," he observed. "Have you left a mother at home?"

"Yes."

"Did *she* recommend you to leave her, and seek your own fortune?"

"No," I answered, with a flushed cheek.

"Had I been in your place, young fellow, I should have waited at least two more years before I had shaken the dust of home from my feet. "There's no place like home, you know, and you'll not find a friend in all London like that mother you are taking French leave of."

"French leave," I repeated.

"Ay, ay, said the sharp gentleman, you are a bad hand at a secret, for you have betrayed it already, to my thinking. You are a runaway!"

"Well," said I, defiantly, "what if I am?"

"Nothing to me," said he, with a short and somewhat unpleasant laugh; "I would not take the trouble to detain you or place you under the care of the next policeman; your mother is well rid of you, doubtless, and if you are determined to see the world, it is not the mother's apron-strings that will keep you away from it."

"It was not the mother——"

I stopped.

The stranger nodded his head.

"Who was it, then?"

"No matter."

"Was it the father, of whom you were tired, or the step-father?—that is nearer the mark, eh? Oh, these step-fathers, what villains they are to high-spirited youths whose bumps of veneration are not largely developed!"

"Are you lodging near here?"

"I sleep at the Half-way-House to-night," he replied; "why do you ask?"

"I thought you might know of a place where I could get a bed—a cheap one."

"The Half-way-House can accommodate you."

"Oh, no—not me!"

"I have taken a bed there, it being a secluded retreat, and

conducted on economical principles—you'll get nothing cheaper, except a haystack."

"But you are a gentleman."

He gave another of those short unpleasant laughs, and shook his head.

"Not with a gentleman's pocket, at any rate, for I am very comfortably poor."

"I don't understand you."

"It is not everybody who does," he said, in a slightly egotistical manner; "if we should chance to see more of each other this evening, perhaps I'll condescend to explain myself, stranger of fifteen summers. Do you see that sign-post yonder?"

"Yes."

"That's the Half-way-House. Half-way to what or where, the Lord only knows, for I don't, neither does the landlord, cadaverous wretch that he is!"

We walked almost the rest of the way towards the roadside inn in silence—my companion trimming his nails with a pen-knife and whistling softly over the operation. We walked very slowly too, for the stranger was a dawdler—never did a man six feet in height, with long legs to correspond, use his locomotive powers more sparingly. He drew one foot after another in the most leisurely manner, and although I was tired and had already tramped my fifteen miles that day, I found it painful to fall in with so slow a rate of progression.

"Am I hurrying you?" he coolly asked at last.

"Oh, no."

A long silence, unbroken till we arrived at the Half-way-House—a small inn overgrown with ivy, standing at the corner of a green and shady lane.

"Picturesque beer-shop!" observed my companion; "would look pretty in a picture, with a Mary the Maid of the Inn sitting in pensive attitude under that little alcove of clematis, or scarlet-runners, which is it?"

"Clematis, I think."

"Now I look again, I am inclined to fancy it's hops; but all green things of the aspiring order have such a strong family likeness, that a London bird like me becomes puzzled with Nature's profusion. Those climbing plants put me in mind of some men of the world I have heard of."

"Do they?" I remarked, for the want of a better observation.

"They struggle desperately to rise, they twist their souls out

to gain something to cling to, they will crawl like a snake on the ground till a mean thing, with its head in the air, can give them a lift, and then they will rise by its support, and perhaps ungratefully choke it for its assistance ; will, at all events, look contemptuously down when there is no further need of its services. They will curl, writhe, and bend, but they will rise very often to the top of the tree and flaunt themselves in the *empty air* which they have struggled so hard to attain."

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Suppose so, boy," he said, with a disparaging downward look at me. "I am not moralising for your behoof ; I was sneering at the hard workers of the world, in a Prince of Denmark soliloquy, thinking what fools those men are who slave all their lives for a shadow, and fling into the waters of oblivion that substance which would have made them respectable and respected. And all this comes out of that porch of clematis, or hops, under which a damsel in a red cloak *should* be sitting, to give one spot of colour to the landscape."

"Are you an artist, Sir ?"

"No—a tumbler."

"A tumbler !" I exclaimed, looking intently at the tall gentleman, and trying to imagine him in tight fleshings and spangles ; "you have come from Nettleton, Sir, I suppose ?"

"What do you know of Nettleton ?" he asked, sharply.

I remembered my own little secret.

"Nothing. There was a fair held there some days ago, I believe."

"Very likely ; and all the grand people patronised it for the want of something better to do, I suppose ; and Squire Heberdeen, his lady, and their interesting children, perhaps, opened the fair, in just such a manner as the Queen of England opens Parliament House—eh ?"

"Who is Squire Heberdeen ?" I asked, in the most artful manner, although rather astonished to find a stranger, and a Londoner, well acquainted with the Nettleton grandees.

"A great man over there," with a flourish of his hand in a vague direction ; "at least, I dare say he is by this time. This is the Half-way-House ; will it suit you ?"

"I don't know—I'll ask."

I found the landlord—he *was* cadaverous—sitting behind the bar and going to sleep, in defiance of a thousand unseasonable flies, who were buzzing round his head and feasting on him. I

found the accommodation reasonable, so reasonable that my doubts as to the pecuniary means of my late companion were considerably strengthened. I settled on a bed for the night, and then rejoined the stranger in the bar-parlour.

"Well—will it suit you?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir."

"Glad to hear it, for I am rather fond of society and fresh faces, and I think it very doubtful if 'parlour company' patronise the Half-way-House to any extent. Play chess?"

"A little."

"Ah! I don't care about chess with one who plays a little—slow work. Cards?"

"No."

"Strictly brought up, for a sixpence?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I don't wonder at your running away from home. Strict disciplinarians always draw the reins a *little* too tight, and then follow the eruption and the disruption. You put me in mind of my young days."

"Were you——"

He held up one finger.

"No matter. 'Those happy days are gone,' as the Sixpenny Vocalist observes, and I never look back at the past—it's not a first rate retrospect. I'm a tumbler, you know."

"I should not have thought it."

Short unpleasant laugh again.

"Not a Bounding Brother, or an India-rubber Child of the Pyrenees, but a true tumbler nevertheless—one who has been better off and less happy."

"Indeed."

"I am a philosopher. Do you know what that is?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I take everything coolly, and let nothing astonish me. I am contented with my position in society down a back street in Chelsea, and I have just money enough to live on if I am sparing of my cash and keep my eyes open."

"May I ask what trade you are?"

"Trade, youth!" with an elevation of his eyebrows and a curl of the lip. "I have a soul above taking penny pieces over a shop-counter—the Markinghams have been always above it, and Stephen, the last of that name, has a soul like his ancestors. Landlord, two glasses of mild ale, and not so many of the *dip-tera* species in the liquid this time."

When the mild ale was brought, and we sat facing each other at a mahogany table, he said :—

"Many of my friends—that is, my acquaintances—say to me sometimes, 'Why don't you turn your education to account?' but that would not be philosophy, but hard work. If I can live and be comfortable without exerting myself, why should I be somebody's slave—a schoolmaster's, a secretary's, a publisher's, in order to put more money in my pocket? If I wear seedy habiliments, I don't owe my tailor for them, and I would as soon live in my two-pair front, as in apartments in the Albany. I can go to the theatres, or take my pleasure in the country, *par exemple*, and richer people than I can only do it in more style, which is a thing I don't care for. As for saving money, that's impossible under the circumstances; and, as I have no one to leave a penny to, why, there would not be even method in my madness. But—ha! ha!—here am I discoursing on philosophy to a boy of fifteen who don't understand half that I am talking about."

"Oh! yes, I do."

"Well, you admire my principle?"

"It's nice and lazy."

"You are a sharp lad," he said, regarding me attentively, "and not a particularly civil one. Still it's a candid opinion, and I admire a man—and a boy too—who speaks out. Drink your ale; it's not too good when it's fresh drawn, and it's second-rate ditch-water if it is allowed to stand a moment."

"Your health, Sir!"

"That's vulgar, but thank you all the same. Do you smoke?"

"No, Sir."

He drew a small meerschaum pipe from his pocket, and proceeded to fill it with tobacco. The sun had sunk by this time, and the landscape, through the ivy-framed window, was becoming grey and dusky.

"'What trade do you mean to follow?' as old Fletcher says."

"I don't know."

"You are going to London in search of a place?"

"Yes; do you know Woodleigh's, in Edgware Road?"

"Have you a berth there?"

"I hope to obtain one."

" 'Hope told a flattering tale,' therefore Hope, in plain language, was a story-teller—the baggage! "

" Which would be my nearest way to the Edgware Road? "

" Time enough to ask that when you are nearer London. I travel your road to-morrow, and if you are not in a hurry, why, we may journey together."

" I must be in London by Friday night, if possible."

" Well, you can do as you like—I shan't walk seventeen miles a-day myself. Landlord, when are you going to light up? This twilight is a terrible thing for the spirits."

The landlord of the Half-way-House entered and lighted the gas, and Mr. Markingham inquired of him if he expected any company that evening.

" There generally is some one," replied the landlord; but he went out of the room with a doubtful expression of countenance.

However, just as Mr. Markingham was refilling his pipe for the fourth time, company arrived in the shape of a master butcher in the vicinity.

" The master butcher was followed by the clerk of the parish, the clerk by a small farmer, and the farmer by a young man with a very red face, who had been at cricket all day, and nearly killed himself with exertion. Beer and spirits were speedily in request; Mr. Markingham had a glass of cold brandy-and-water, and I ordered on my own account a half-pint of ale—not that I wanted it, but that I feared that the host of the Half-way-House might think me shabby.

I sat by the table almost unheeded, dozing over my 'mild sixpenny' and straining my bundle to my breast. The butcher, the clerk, the farmer, the cricketer, and my new acquaintance, were all soon with pipes in their mouths, and the room was filling with smoke and becoming a queer atmosphere to exist in. The smoke presently made me cough, and coughing woke me up for good. It was a dull, comfortless evening; the society was mixed and not of my class; I did not comprehend the subjects of discourse, and I did not care for them. I could not help observing that my friend of the afternoon had a great deal to say on every topic that was started, and to say it, too, in a light, easy manner which betokened a man well up in his subject. He seemed to know a great deal about everything; he talked of plays and play-actors, politics, last Ascot Races, foreign parts, fly-fishing, and religion. His ideas on the last point were so startling that he frightened the parlour customers and made my hair stand on end; he disputed with the

•

parish clerk—who was a well-read man in the Lessons of the day, as became his position—and the parish clerk got out of temper, and wished he had the parson there to back him, “He would be the gentleman’s match, he’d wager a glass of brandy-and-water round on it!”

I thought, if my stern, devout step-father had been there, how he would have turned up his eyes at the sceptic and scoffer! how he would have preached at him, and banged the table with his fist, and knocked the beer-mugs over! If that step-father could have seen me then, at that hour, in that place, he would have given me up as wholly lost.

When I was within an inch of suffocation from tobacco-smoke, I went out of the room with my bundle under my arm. I took up my position by the horse-trough and under the creaking sign, and looked at the great white moon shining through the trees across the road. It was a pretty country spot, and reminded me so of Nettleton that it made my heart sink. So sweet and still the landscape before me in the moonlight, and yet in some mysterious way so depressing to the feelings! I stood and wondered what they were all doing in the far-away old town I had quitted—what my mother and Mr. Bowden were doing—what mischief Tom Arrow was after—Tom, my old comrade, the boy friend whom I might never see again!

“Moon-struck, my lad?”

I started. Mr. Markingham was at my side; those clear grey eyes of his were looking at me—through me.

“Not quite moon-struck yet, Sir.”

“Tired of the parlour company?”

“Rather.”

“*Et moi aussi.* An ignorant lot, but then,” with a shrug of his shoulders, “what can be expected in this place? Let us stroll to the river side again, and see how the moon touches up the beautiful. Such a night as this is worth the whole of my fortnight’s ramble from the London smoke and bustle. Are you coming?”

“No, thank you; I am tired. I shall go straight to bed now.”

“Good-night, then. Here goes for a stroll in true poet fashion. If you should not hear of me to-morrow morning, be kind enough to have the river dragged, my man.”

CHAPTER II.

TO LONDON

MR. MARKINGHAM was down stairs before me the next morning.

"Ah! good-morning to you," he said, looking up from his early breakfast as I entered the bar-parlour—"I shall have the start of you to-day."

"I shall overtake you, Sir."

"Very likely. You intend that seventeen miles' walk to-day, then?"

"I must be in London by Friday night."

"In order to begin business the first thing on Saturday morning?"

"If I get the chance."

"Ah! I fear that you will not find London so full of vacancies as you fancy. There are plenty of people out of work in that quarter—plenty of people stronger, more clever, more experienced than the young gentleman whom I have the honour to address. If you will take my advice, you will turn tail and go back to your mother."

"No, Sir," said I, sternly; "better beg in the streets than go back like a coward."

"Well, I don't know your story, so my advice is uncalled for. Still you are very young; have you anywhere to go?"

"No."

"And you are not sure of a place at this Woodleigh's?"

"Far from sure."

"And you know nothing of London?"

"Nothing."

"Then I admire your spirit, and I only hope that it may not fail you. You must have had hard provocation to have started on this wild-goose errand."

I did not answer. Now my anger had abated, the provocation seemed but a small one, and the step I had taken more unjustifiable than ever. However, I did not tell the inquisitive stranger this, although he was evidently a kind man, for all his satirical remarks on persons and things.

Mr. Markingham strolled from the inn shortly afterwards, and when I had had my own frugal breakfast—two biscuits and some more of that exceedingly mild ale—I stepped out in good style and overtook him about a mile from the Half-way-house. We journeyed together the rest of the morning, Mr. Markingham condescending to suit his rate of progression to my own. I had awakened an interest in him, and he did not care to disguise it. “I reminded him of his young days,” he had said last night, and that remembrance soon made him something more than an acquaintance one meets by the roadside. He talked of London and my prospects, gave me much valuable advice as to my future course, warned me not to be too sanguine of success in town, or too eager to make new friends there. Once or twice my story was on the tip of my tongue, but I refrained, although my boy’s heart was full, and there was something in the manner of the traveller that encouraged confidence. I resolved to put off my confession till the afternoon, but before the afternoon came, Mr. Markingham acknowledged himself beaten, and declined to proceed further at so headlong a pace.

“I’m not a youth with his veins full of life and his heart full of energy,” he said; “forty years of age, backed by a weak constitution, cannot stride along in seven-league boots and feel never the worse for it. Go your way, young man, and if my wishes for good luck are worth anything, take them and be happy. Think over my advice as you proceed.”

“I will, Sir.”

“Perhaps I shall meet you to-morrow, homeward bound.”

“Not yet awhile, Mr. Markingham,” said I, setting off again.

“When I looked back, he was lounging on a grassy bank, the very picture of indolence. He waved a shabby kid glove towards me as a sign of farewell, till a bend of the road hid the “philosopher” from view.

I was sorry that I had parted from him—he was an easy, good-tempered being—if Mr. Bowden had been only like him, I should not have run away from Nettleton.

I walked on at a rapid pace; I had resolved to do seventeen miles that day, and I completed my task by five o’clock in the afternoon.

I passed through Windsor without looking right or left, and halted at a quiet-looking village a few miles further on. Pre-

sently, to my astonishment, Mr. Markingham appeared in sight, leaning against a mile-stone and smoking his pocket meerschaum.

"Well done, young wanderer," he exclaimed, "what a thing it is to be young—heigho!"

"How did you get here, Sir?"

"By railway—I thought that I should save shoe-leather and a deal of unnecessary exertion if I rode a few miles by way of change. I have been here these two hours, and have spent the time in exploring. I have discovered another quiet inn, where the terms are moderate, and the beer better than at the last establishment."

"I feel inclined to walk on," said I.

"Your seventeen miles are completed," observed he, tapping the mile-stone against which he was leaning, "and a very fair day's work you have got through. Come with me, and I'll show you the inn."

I did not proceed further that night; I spent the evening with Mr. Markingham, not in the parlour in the midst of company and tobacco-smoke, but on the moonlit banks of the Thames. I told him my story that night, not mentioning names or places, and he listened very attentively, and when I had brought my narrative to an end, indulged in a low long whistle which reminded me of Tom Arrow.

"Anger and heedlessness are bad qualities to begin the world with, youngster," said he; "if you don't keep them in the background, they will extinguish all hope and leave you for ever in the dark. Rash lad, to leave home, a good mother—ay, and a good second father too—for the unknown and untried. I thought your wrongs were far greater, and had no idea you were so small a fury. Well, your mother will be all the happier when the first trouble is over."

"I dare say she will," I answered sullenly.

I had expected sympathy from him, and his remarks nettled me. His humour seemed to change, and he was not the agreeable man that I had hitherto found him. On the previous evening I had observed an undercurrent of sarcasm running through several parts of his discourse—but I was not prepared for a severe criticism on my conduct, for a series of remarks that were bitter, jesting and contemptuous. He appeared to delight in his own observations, too; his grey eyes brightened, and his cheeks flushed; it was his element in which he was disporting, and he

splashed, and dived, and sprinkled me with polite abuse all the way home to the inn.

At the door he stopped, and laid a thin white hand—a hand like a delicate woman's—on my arm.

"You appear surprised and affronted," he remarked; "but you cannot expect to jostle through life and not meet with hard-hearted people. You will stare when you hear that I have been jesting all this while."

"Jesting!"

"Playing a part, to see how you could bear it."

"What part?"

"That of the world, which you will find rougher and more unfeeling than I," said he; "and, truly speaking, you have borne it very well for a youth who is partial to flinging chimney-ornaments, and knocking people's teeth out. You may get on, although you ought to come to grief, if it's only for the sake of a warning to hot-headed boys like you. There, I have ended my satire now. I was not in my Diogenes vein, or I might have done it better. Come in."

The next morning we started together again, and before the morning was ended, Mr. Markingham once more acknowledged himself beaten, and declined to proceed at my rate of progression.

"I shall go the rest of the way by train—cut across the fields here to the railway-station—will you join me?"

I shook my head. I was almost penniless, and every half-penny in my pocket was precious at that time.

"It will save several hours," he said.

"No, Sir—I must walk."

He took a few shillings from his purse, and began counting them over.

"Let me see, to-day's Friday—say four shillings—Saturday, a fresh supply, and a fair start again. Yes, I can do it. Come on."

"Not that way, thank you."

"I have a ticket for you—the gentleman who drives the engine is a particular friend of mine, and has put me on the free list."

I saw through his ruse, and shook my head.

"Very well," said he; "ease and independence for ever. Perhaps you are in the right to begin the world 'free of all demands,' as the receipts say. Good-bye."

He extended his hand towards me and shook mine heartily.

"When do you go after this situation?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Will you call to-morrow evening on me—No. 2, Barker-street, Chelsea—and let me know the result?"

"If my—if I obtain a situation at Woodleigh's, I think I will, Sir, thank you."

"But if you fail, I may suggest something."

"If I fail, Sir, I would rather be alone in the world for a little while."

"Will you store my address in your memory? I have no card to offer you—I don't see the philosophy of pasteboard."

"I shall remember your address."

"Then good-bye."

He stopped again.

"One more piece of advice: write home to your mother when you reach London; it will not take a great deal of time, or be a very expensive proceeding. Good-day to you."

"Good-day, Sir."

He raised his hat and saluted me in an easy and gentlemanly manner, that seemed to tell of the better days, and I imitated his example by removing my cap. Thus we parted, and I walked the rest of the way to London alone.

I reached town in safety—reached it when the streets were full of people; when the lights were in the shop windows, and cabs, carts, and omnibuses were rattling noisily about the streets.

It had a bewildering effect on me, that first five minutes of my entry into London; it was a great contrast to Nettleton—there were many people about the streets; I felt utterly alone, undecided whither to go now the haven was reached, and I stood at my journey's end. However, I settled down at last; there were plenty of places where a cheap bed could be procured, and a friendly policeman kindly pointed out a respectable lodging-house.

I wrote a letter to my mother that night, assuring her that I was well, in London, and quite safe—that I should write again soon and tell her all the news, and all my resolutions! I added that I should get on in the world now I had no one to please but myself, and perhaps it was better for everybody that I had ran away from Nettleton. After a stroll in the streets again in search of a post-office and a light supper, I returned to my cheap bed, and fell asleep, to dream of the morning that was coming, and of the day that had passed.

CHAPTER III.

RELATIONS.

THE next morning I equipped myself in my best clothes, and consigned my week-day suit to the depths of my bundle. It was striking ten when I was in the streets again and had obtained information concerning the nearest way to Edgware Road from another respectable and well-informed policeman.

Bundle in hand, I hurried on my mission, fearing the worst, yet hoping for the best. I found London as bewildering as yesternight. The world was hurrying by me, and the constant stream of people made me dizzy. I had been so used to Nettleton and to the "still life" in its precincts, had seen in my younger days so little of the turmoil of the busy city, that the nature of the scene in which I moved could scarcely be realised, and had I suddenly found myself in my little bed at Nettleton, a waker up from troubled dreams, I should not have been very much surprised.

But it was no dream; the myriad faces passing by,—strange inflexible faces, faces absorbed, faces of care, and faces full of eagerness—were too strongly marked with life to have their rise in visions.

Are all these people struggling, scheming for subsistence? I thought; is each man who passes bent upon some errand that shall put money in his pocket? and, in the midst of the great world of workers, is there room for one young, rash, and ignorant?

Glancing at the crowd in which I mingled, I thought how hard it would be to find a helping hand within it, and how easy to be lost in its midst, and never heard of more!

There were starving women on the doorsteps, clasping infants to their breasts, and the world went by and cared not—there were men to whom that world was darkness, groping along and crying "Blind," and other men too wide-awake to heed them, jostling them aside and angry with the sightless beggars in the way; there were rich men, Pharisees with gold chains and diamond pins, scouting the weak and helpless, forgetful of the story of old Lazarus; and I felt that to succeed amid the selfish crowd, one must be hard, stern, and selfish too.

My heart sunk still more as I neared Edgware Road, and when I stood before two great gates on which were written, "WOODLEIGH, RAILWAY CARRIER, CONTRACTOR, &c.," I had to lean against a post to collect my courage. Upon the next quarter of an hour depended my whole after-career, perhaps,—my success in life, or ruin!

Beyond the gates, which were open, stretched an extensive yard, and at its extremity were offices, warehouses and stables. There was considerable bustle in the distance; rough, gigantic men were labouring at heavy burdens, a van was being piled with luggage, and horses and carmen were moving to and fro.

"What room is there yonder for a boy like me?" I soliloquised, in true Hamlet fashion. "It's all up, there's no chance for me! I had better turn away and seek another situation. I am only a child—not fifteen years of age till next month—what a fool I was to run away from home!"

Then I thought of Mr. Bowden, of my uncle, of the fly-leaf in that family Bible I had left behind, of my unknown cousins, of the far away time when my father was my uncle's partner, when father and uncle were both poor brothers, striving with an energy that made the latter's fortune, but destroyed my father's health and killed him.

"Well, it's no good standing here, Robert Woodleigh," I muttered to myself, *a la* Hamlet again; "the 'Railway Carrier, Contractor, &c.' is a near relation, and there's nothing you have to be ashamed of before him. You were never particularly bashful—people in Nettleton called you a bold young rascal—a black sheep! They can't eat you in the yard, and you can't be worse off than you are now, if the worst comes to the worst. So make up your mind at once, Bob, and then—quick march!"

It was a struggle to nerve myself to the task, but I succeeded. I set my teeth together, pulled my cap over my brows, tacked my bundle more firmly under my right arm, and buttoned my jacket with my left hand.

"Here goes. One, two three, and—away!"

I would not think any more on the subject. I made a dash across the road, rushed along the yard, turned the corner to the right, stood a moment, casting a hurried glance round me, caught sight of a door on which was written "Office," darted towards it, pushed it open, fell over the step, dropped my bundle, and went plunging into the sanctum sanctorum, almost head foremost.

•

"Hollo, here!" cried a young man, perched on a high office-stool before a desk near the window; "what game's this? Make a little less noise, will you?"

When I had recovered myself and picked up my bundle, I glanced at the young man on the stool. He was the only occupant of the office, and there was certainly no blood of the Woodleighs in *his* veins. It was possible that seven years and upwards would make a difference in the personal appearance of my cousins, but the young man on the stool was not a Woodleigh for all that, and I was very sorry for it.

"Now, then, what's your business?" asked the young man, sharply.

I glanced at him again. He was not a pleasant young man to look at; he was a red-faced, pimply being, of about twenty years of age, and he had a defect in his vision which ill-natured people would have termed a squint. There was an official appearance about him which impressed me though, as he sat perched on the high stool, the cuffs of his green plaid coat turned up in a business-like manner, a ruler in one hand, a pen in the other, and a quill pen, which had been dipped in red ink, behind his ear.

"I wish to see Mr. Woodleigh."

"Mr. Woodleigh's not in."

"What time will he be in, Sir?"

"I don't know," said the clerk, twisting round on his stool, and squinting at me frightfully. "What is it you want with him? Can't I do as well? I'm Mr. Woodleigh's private secretary."

"Oh! are you?" I replied, thinking Mr. Woodleigh might have selected a better specimen, at any rate.

"Have you brought a message?"

"No, Sir."

His looks fell in an oblique manner on my bundle.

"Oh! I see—you've got something to sell. Come, that won't do here, you know."

"I wish to see Mr. Woodleigh."

"Mr. Woodleigh's gone to Bath in search of a fashionable hairdresser, and will not be back till Saturday three weeks."

And with this appalling announcement he twisted himself into his former position, and resumed the occupation from which my sudden appearance had diverted him. I stood

and watched the back of the office coat, the movement of the right arm, and the ledgerdemain manner in which he occasionally changed the pen with the black ink for the pen with the red.

"Can you give me Mr. Woodleigh's address, please?" I said, after a long silence.

"What! haven't you gone yet?" he cried, looking round once more. "Well, this is pretty cool, I must say. Now, have you come on any business that requires *my* attention?"

"No."

"And you haven't brought a message?"

"No."

"Has anybody sent you here?"

"No."

"Then just be off!"

He sprang off the office stool, ran to the door, opened it wide, and pointed to the yard.

"That's your way, and if you won't go quietly, I shall make you."

I looked at this very officious gentleman. He was a thin young man, and rather weak in the knees; there would certainly be some difficulty in forcing my retirement, though he was full five years my senior.

"I will go when you give me Mr. Woodleigh's address; if you try to *make* me before, you will have some trouble, and perhaps get hurt."

I laid my bundle on a vacant chair and doubled my fists in a menacing manner.

The private secretary put his head out of the office doorway, and looked up and down the yard. The van had gone, and there was not a man in sight to help him.

"Why didn't you say you wanted the address before?" said he, "instead of bothering me with your nonsense. Wait a moment, and I'll give it you. Don't be frightened—I'm not going to touch you!"

"I'm not frightened in the least, thank you," I replied, as he passed me, went back to his desk, and wrote something on a slip of paper which he afterwards extended to me. I advanced and took the address.

"Is this quite right?"

"Of course it is."

"Grove House, Tottenham—where's Tottenham?"

"Anybody will tell you. You must work your way to Shore-ditch, and then——"

He did **not** complete his sentence, for with a sudden spring he bounded on to the **high** stool, turned his back upon me, and recommenced writing in a vigorous manner. I was at a loss to account for this acrobatic feat, till a sharp clear voice outside suggested the reason.

"There will be a van from the Great Western in five minutes, John—where have **all** the men got to?—where's Bowler?—where's Simmons?—this is always the way when Mr. Woodleigh or my back's turned a minute. Here, Jones, just run with this to the stores. Who's up in the warehouse? Now, look alive there with the horses!"

The door was pushed open, and a youth of sixteen or seventeen years of age walked briskly into the office. A youth not very tall for his age, but a sturdy, well-proportioned youth, with a good-looking, freckled face.

"Here, Watkinson, make an entry of this, will you?" he said, bustling to the desk and placing a paper on it.

"Yes, Sir."

"As quick as you can, because it will be called for. Has Mr Woodleigh come back?"

"No, Mr. Upton."

"Anybody been?"

"No, Sir—that is, only this fellow," pointing in my direction with the feather of his pen; "he won't go away. He has not been sent here on business, and he has not brought a message. I think he has got something to sell in that bundle."

Upton Woodleigh wheeled round, and our eyes met. The children of two brothers looked each other in the face, but my blood relations countenance expressed no sign of recognition. However, it was a frank open countenance that prepossessed me in my cousin's favour, and there was such a Woodleigh look about the eyes that I could not fancy him a stranger. But eight years had passed since I had seen him last—he was then a curly-haired little boy of nine years old, and wore a Scotch dress and a velvet plaid cap; and now he was quite a sharp man of business, and looked nearer twenty years of age than seventeen.

"What is your business, my man? If it's anything to sell, we don't want to buy it, and we haven't time to look at it."

"I did wish to see your father, but I understand he is at Bath."

"Bath!" repeated my cousin, with a slight laugh; "he has got there pretty quick then. He was here half an hour ago."

I looked at the mendacious clerk, who, after a scowl of warning, bent himself into the letter S over the account-books.

"Will it be long before he returns?"

"It's uncertain," was the reply; "why don't you state your business? It can't be so very important."

"I'll tell you if you will step into the yard a moment. Perhaps you will not care to hear who I am before your private secretary."

He looked at Watkinson, muttered "Private secretary indeed," and walked into the yard. I took my bundle from the chair and followed him.

"Now then," he said, when the office door was closed behind him; "sharp's the word, young fellow. Who are you?"

"Robert Woodleigh."

"Rob—Robert Woodleigh!" exclaimed my cousin; "you don't mean that!"

"No credit to Upton Woodleigh as a relation, perhaps," I said, with a glance at my Sunday habiliments.

"My Cousin Robert," said he, with his keen bright eyes surveying me; "well, that's a startler, at all events. How are you?"

He extended his hand towards me, and when mine was placed within it, he gave it a cordial shake.

"Whoever would have thought of seeing you here to-day? By Jove, this is a surprise! I say, cousin, you have altered considerably since you and I played at marbles in the little back yard in Queen Street. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, well."

"Remember brother Dick, too? He's being brought up to the Church."

"And you?"

"I have begun the world early, you see. I prefer my father's business to racketing about college; Dick likes college, likes the fun there too, but I can't exactly fancy Dick in the pulpit, and I don't believe he fancies it himself. How is Aunt Woodleigh? I ought to have asked about her before."

"She is very well, thank you. Are your sisters well—and little Johnny, whom I left a baby?"

"Oh, they are all right. And—here's the governor!"

The governor, Uncle Woodleigh, a short, thin man, with a sallow countenance and great grey whiskers, came at a rapid pace through the gateway, with a dozen papers fluttering in his hands. As he advanced, he looked sharply from me to his son, then to me again.

"What is the matter?—who's this?" he said, with a rapidity of utterance that was difficult to follow—"any message been sent from Wixon's, or is he waiting for an answer from Tolboy's? Tolboy's answer went by post, and everything will be attended to—where's Watkinson?"

"In the office."

"Has not the van come yet?—and—and what did you say this lad wanted?"

"Wants to see you, Mr. Woodleigh," said Upton with a smile—"it's a relation of ours."

"A relation—why, who?—where does he come from?—what's his name?—it's not—surely it is, though"—looking at me intently—"the devil take me if it is not Robert's boy! Bless my soul and body, what has brought you to London?—is anything wrong?—is your mother ill or dead, or anything of that sort?"

"No, uncle. I have come to London to earn my own living. My step-father and I could not agree together—and the truth is, I ran away from home, and here I am."

"Is your mother married again?"

"Yes."

"I never heard of it," said my uncle, looking as offended as if he had been my mother's most intimate friend since her husband's death—"it's very odd that I was not told of it—very disrespectful—might have written me a line at least. And so they treated you badly?"

"I don't know that my step-father treated me badly," I replied. "He was a strict man and did not understand me. I thought it would be better to come to London. I thought, too, that for the sake of relationship you might find a place—I don't care what sort of place it is—for the son of your old partner."

"Dear, dear me, this is very singular—old partner, nephew run away from home and come to me for work. Robert's boy, too,—why, how old are you?"

"Fifteen next month."

"You are not fit for out-door work, driving a van, or anything of that sort ; I'm afraid there's nothing for you to do here, my boy. We're quite full at present, and the business would never suit you, I think you had better go home again and—what's that for ?"

I had shaken my head at his suggestion, and my action of dissent had caught his eye.

"I shall not go home, Uncle Woodleigh. I have not walked sixty miles to return by the same road. I have come to London to earn my own living, and if you cannot put me in the way of it, why, I must find it in the streets."

I was turning to go away when he cried—

"Don't be hasty—bless my soul, he's my brother Robert all over ; just like him, not an atom of prudence. What can you do—read, write,—any hand at figures ?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Might do in the office, eh, Upton—what do you think—might *try* him for a week ?"

"Oh yes ; and there's room for him in the office, too, if it's only to look after Watkinson. We can't send him away, you know," was the reply.

"You have no objection to make yourself generally useful ?" asked my uncle.

"I'm not afraid of work."

"Your father was not," said my uncle ; "and I hope you take after him. I don't know what I can make of you yet—don't know whether you are even worth your salt. However, I'll try you for a week ; you can come next Monday at six o'clock."

Upton said something to his father in a low voice.

"No, decidedly not," replied my uncle, dropping his voice also ; "not to be thought of for an instant. There's no one at home to amuse him, and it's a bad practice to begin with—a too familiar proceeding by half. We know nothing of him yet ; he's a boy without a character, one who has run away from home, and we don't know what for. Bless my soul, it's rather imprudent, now I come to think of it !"

To describe the railway rate at which this speech was delivered is beyond my power ; the words absolutely rolled over one another, and into one another, in their eagerness to come forth. Fortunately, he was a long-winded man, and had not the slightest impediment in his speech, or he would have died of suffocation years ago.

He turned to me

"You had better tell your mother where you are, I think, and what you are going to do. Whom has your mother married ? "

"A Methodist preacher—Mr. Bowden."

"Bowden, eh ? " said he ; "*Bowden*, did you say ? "

"Yes, Bowden."

"That's singular, Upton," he remarked. "But still it is not an uncommon name. Methodist, you say ; a good man, I have no doubt. What made you run away from him ? "

Briefly as possible I related the particulars of the dispute with my step-father, and the result. My uncle had hardly patience to listen ; he was a restless, excitable man, and fidgeted extremely during the recital of my story. He looked at his watch, at his papers, at a van lumbering into the yard ; he interrupted me twice by shouting some orders to the carman ; he beat a tattoo with both feet ; he rubbed his hands one over the other ; he took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Yes, yes, yes," he said, when I had arrived at a conclusion ; "I understand—you were quite right, or very wrong, there's not the slightest doubt. Well, come on Monday ; we are very busy just now, you see, Robert, and—Hi ! there. I want you."

Mr. Woodleigh took to his heels, and an instant afterwards was in the midst of his men, gesticulating violently, shouting, forth orders, and altogether in a state of frenzy.

"The governor is quite the man of business, is he not, Robert ? and as quick as ever in making up his mind to anything," said Upton. "Do you see much difference in him ? "

"I should have known him anywhere."

"He's a trifle more energetic, and perhaps more irritable, but then business has increased the last two years, and brought many cares and responsibilities. I wanted my father to increase his staff six months ago, but he would not listen to my proposition."

"Have you been long in the business ? "

"A year. My father took me away from boarding-school early ; he did not think a young railway carrier required many accomplishments at his finger ends. Reading, writing and arithmetic, I was well up in, and that was enough for him, and—for me, too."

"I suppose it will be Woodleigh and Son soon?"

"Some day," said he with a laugh. "When I am twenty-one and the Son is inscribed on those gates, perhaps I shall get the men to mind me more. They are a set of obstinate rascals at present, and think I am too young to give orders to them, or keep a sharp eye on the Woodleigh interests. But," with a light shake of the head, "they're wrong there."

"I fear that I am detaining you, Upton."

"Well, we are rather busy, Robert. When a van comes in, it's like stirring up a beehive—makes a general confusion, and keeps everybody's eyes open. You will not forget to come on Monday."

"No. And as I have not thanked you yet——"

"Oh, never mind your thanks," he interrupted; "it would have been hard not to have helped a relation, the son of an old partner, too, as you observed to the governor. Why, do you know, Robert, that you are the only cousin we have in the world?"

"You had all nearly forgotten him, I dare say."

"No, we had not," was the quick reply; "for although the London Woodleighs were drifting a different way from the country ones, yet we had a habit of saying now and then, 'I wonder where Aunt Woodleigh is?' or 'I wonder if we shall ever see Cousin Robert again?'"

"You did not expect to see me in this plight, Upton?"

"Why, no. We all fancied your mother had married a rich man, gone abroad, and taken you with her."

"It is easier to fancy than to make inquiry."

"Eh?" said Upton, looking at me with some surprise. "Oh! yes, you are right enough—it *is* easier. Friends and relations who are fifty miles apart fall into an apathetic way concerning each other's pursuits, and as time goes on, so the apathy increases, I am ashamed to say."

"Especially when one branch of the family is going up hill, and the other down."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so," answered Upton, in his father's hurried manner; "that always makes a difference, and always will—it is one of those facts that can't be helped, Robert Woodleigh, grumble as we may."

I felt the reproof conveyed in his reply.

"And it is not my place to grumble—I, who have just received a proof of my relative's kindness—is it? But I will not detain you, cousin; good-day."

"Wait a moment. It's — it's," putting his hand in his pocket, "customary here to pay the first week's salary in advance, if required, and we know the party. Have you any objection to receive it, Robert?"

"It's always customary?" I repeated in a doubtful manner.

"Yes—of course it is—did you not know it?" he replied. "Your salary will not be large to begin with, Robert—not more than ten or twelve shillings a-week,—and here's a half-sovereign, will that do?"

I took the welcome coin with a faint "thank you." Although I had only sixpence and a few coppers in my pocket, it made my cheeks flush and my chest heave to receive money for which I had not worked. It was like bestowing alms upon me, for he could see how poor I was! As my fingers closed upon the piece of gold, I felt what a difference there was between the giver and receiver—the rich man's son and the poor wanderer. One would be master, and the other, whose father was once a partner in the firm, would be a servant and a slave.

I went away discontented, although the object of my mission was accomplished, and the means of living in London afforded me; I felt that I was unjust, selfish, envious, and that the demon of discontent was at my side prompting me to thoughts ungenerous.

Those thoughts I did not seek to stifle as I walked on; I let them prey upon me. I began to consider myself aggrieved that I had not been asked to dinner at Grove House, Tottenham—that I had not been considered by my relations good enough for their society, now that they had risen in the world, and were making money. I was only fit to be their office-boy, to run on errands, perhaps—"to make myself," as Uncle Woodleigh had observed, "generally useful." And yet I was of the same race; my father would have been as grand as any of them had he lived to reap the profits of that business which he had helped to form, and I should have been a young master there, like Cousin Upton, or a college student, like Cousin Dick.

"Never mind, there's a way to make for myself," a better genius whispered at last, "and success will be sweetened by my own exertions." Weak is the mind and feeble the hand of the pilgrim who gives way in the outset of life, with youth in its spring, and the world's prizes before him!

CHAPTER IV

I FINISH THE DAY.

I DID not immediately set forth in search of No. 2, Barker Street, Chelsea, after obtaining employment at the railway carrier's of the name of Woodleigh. I indulged in a cheap dinner at an eating-house, where the quantity of meat for sixpence was of greater consideration than the quality, and then sauntered into Hyde Park, and spent the afternoon in reflections of a varied order, after the manner mentioned in my last chapter.

It was nearly five o'clock when I was in the neighbourhood of Chelsea, looking for Barker Street. I had resolved to go to Mr. Markingham's and tell him of my good fortune, feeling sure that he would be glad to hear my story.

It was singular that I should look forward to a meeting with Mr. Markingham as to an interview with an old friend, forgetting that he was almost a stranger to me, and one of whose pursuits I knew nothing. Still, he had been kind to me, and though there many traits in his character that I did not admire, yet there was still an attraction that drew me towards him.

Are there not some men in the world with whom we are friends at first sight, and others of whom a life-long knowledge gains not an inch of our hearts?

Mr. Markingham was one of the former; he had shown an interest in me, flattered me into liking him, and yet was he not a dangerous man to be acquainted with?—a man who saw philosophy in indolence and selfishness, and had peculiar ideas on matters of religion. I had a vague notion that I was rather too anxious to continue the acquaintance of Mr. Markingham, when I had the knocker of No. 2, Barker Street, in my hand.

"Is Mr. Markingham within?" I inquired of a middle-aged woman who responded to my summons.

"Two-pair front," was the short reply.

Leaving me to find the way for myself, the woman shut the door and went into the parlour. I ascended the stairs, which I found quite a striking feature of the house and full of variety, preliminary flight being neatly carpeted, the second

—starting from the first-floor—a shabby oil-cloth, worn into holes in many places, and the third—leading to upper regions which I did not penetrate—destitute of any covering whatever, and presenting a bare, unwashed appearance to the eye of an observer.

I stood before Mr. Markingham's door, and announced my presence outside by a tap on the panels.

"Come in," answered the voice from the interior.

I entered.

It was a room of moderate size, and furnished without any pretensions to elegance. Before the windows were two dusty Venetian blinds, one of which had been drawn up to the top, and the other left *in statu quo*. There was a small round table in the centre of the room, a bookcase in one corner, and a sofa near the fire-place—a sofa that I had no doubt did duty as a bedstead later in the evening. Moreover, there was a piano—such an extraordinary piano; it took up one side of the room and intrenched upon the door (which it kept from opening to the fullest extent), and had about a dozen slim spider-like legs, some of which had given way in earlier times and been put up again slantwise. There was a small row of keys in the centre of the instrument, and there was a mahogany flap to cover them, that had lost two hinges out of three.

Mr. Markingham was stretched full length on the sofa, solacing himself as usual with his meerschaum pipe. His figure was wrapped in a faded dressing-gown of a mysterious texture, which looked like old green baize, but wasn't.

"I expected you," said he.

"Did you, Sir?"

"I thought that you would change your mind about not calling if—but you have never got the place!"

"Yes, Sir, I have."

"Take a seat," said he, and give me time to recover my surprise. "Is it possible so hare-brained an errand has ended so profitably, and that a situation was waiting for you at your journey's end? Why, there's destiny in it, or you possess that grand secret of success for which hundreds of starvelings would be thankful."

"The secret is, Sir, that Mr. Woodleigh is my uncle."

"Oh! I see," he said; "that makes a vast difference, albeit uncles are not always too ready in offering the helping hand to their nephews. You have grand relations, then,—wholesalers,

belonging to the aristocracy of trade—fortunate lad, when are you going to dine with them ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ May I ask what salary you will receive ? ” said he ; “ if it is a delicate point, pray don’t satisfy my curiosity.”

“ Twelve shillings a-week.”

“ A fair start for a youth fresh from the buttercups and daisies,” he observed ; “ and where have you pitched your tent in this wilderness of bricks and mortar ? ”

“ Nowhere, at present ; I thought that you might know of a room that would suit me.”

“ You do not require apartments on a very grand scale, I presume ? ” he said ; “ not particular concerning the quality of the plate, or the fineness of the table-linen ? ”

“ Not more particular than yourself,” I answered shortly.

For a moment his face flushed as though I had pained him, but he gave his short hard laugh and said :

“ That’s right, young man ; copy me, and sink living for appearances—one little struggle, and then a man is comfortable for ever afterwards. How do you like Barker Street ? ”

“ It is quiet.”

“ Not a great distance from Edgware Road, and a pleasant walk to business across the park. Try it.”

“ Where can I get a bed-room ? ”

“ My respected, amiable, and accomplished landlady has for disposal—has had for disposal the last six months, unfortunately—a small back bed-room at the top of the house, the window commanding a fine view of several acres of tiles. I have no doubt that room is at your service, and that a half-crown a-week, perhaps less, will satisfy the cormorant in the mob-cap. I mean the amiable female before alluded to.”

“ That would suit me.”

“ And when you are inclined for society, you can come down stairs of an evening and knock at the door of this room, and if Stephen Markingham be within and in an amiable humour—for that is not always the case, even with philosophers—you will be admitted, and taught chess, or cribbage, or economy, or philosophy, or,” waving his hand majestically towards the piano, “ music on Markingham’s grand. Will you be kind enough to ring the bell ? ”

I touched a bell-handle by the fire-place, but the summons was not responded to.

“ My easy temper,” said Mr. Markingham, after laying his

pipe aside and indulging in a formidable yawn, "gets imposed on here. I have no doubt the landlady is observing to herself at this very moment :—'It's only Mr. M.'s bell ; *he* can wait.' Be kind enough to keep on ringing."

I complied with his request, and in a very short space of time the middle-aged landlady who had admitted me into the house made her appearance, looking very red in the face with suppressed indignation.

"Tea for two, Mrs. Bants," said the philosopher ; "and—one moment, if you please—this young friend of mine is desirous of engaging the third floor back on reasonable terms. Mrs. Bants, allow me to introduce to you—Mr. Hastyboy."

I laughed, and Mrs. Bants, whose looks of indignation had vanished like a dream, regarded me in a motherly manner. Business was soon concluded between us ; the third floor back was engaged for two shillings a-week, and my bundle was taken formally into my apartments. I had tea with Mr. Markingham, after a few objections on my part, which he quickly overruled by promising to have tea with me some day in return.

"This sort of amusement," said he to me, as he poured out my fifth cup, "tells us, the lords of creation, what helpless mortals we are in domestic matters, and how the fair sex are not to be despised, after all. Bachelorship certainly has its disadvantages."

"I wonder you don't marry, then, Sir."

"My time is past. Forty years of single blessedness have moulded my character and adamantised my resolutions. Besides, I am a poor man, and a wife is an expensive luxury. It's like cream with your tea ; you can't have it without paying for it, and even then you may get a sour and indifferent specimen for your money. Another cup ? "

"No, thank you."

"Where do you think of going to-night ? "

"Really, I don't know, Sir."

"You are not engaged ? "

"Oh, no."

"Then let us stroll westward, and see what we can find to finish the day with, Mr.—Woodleigh, I suppose ? "

"Yes, Sir."

"Well, friend Woodleigh, if you will wait till I have changed my dressing-gown, I am at your service."

Five minutes afterwards we were in the King's Road,

Chelsea, walking arm-in-arm through that bustling thoroughfare as Damon and Pythias might have walked through the streets of old Athens. Damon the second was an elderly friend though, one who was yet to be tried and trusted. An acquaintance had sprung up suddenly—hastily, too—and it is not only hasty marriages that are repented at leisure!

"Halt!" cried Mr. Markingham.

We stopped before a tobacconist's shop, and my companion, twirling the ends of his grey moustache, stood and inspected a row of play bills beneath the window.

"Fond of theatres, Woodleigh?"

"I have not been since I was a little boy."

"Did your step-father take you then?" with a cynical smile.

"My own father did."

"Ah! he was not a hard man, I know. Let us see: *Surrey Theatre, October 1st*. Oh! that is last week's bill. *Haymarket, Saturday, October 8th, 1842*—that's to-night—'*Alma Mater*.' 'Sir Samuel Sarcasm, Mr. Farren; Widow Venture, Mrs. Glover. Eleventh time of *Grandfather Whitehead*!' Shall we go?"

I hesitated. The spectre of Mr. Bowden seemed to pass before my eyes and make a threatening gesture. THE PLAY! the sink of abomination and vice! as Mr. Bowden would have called it; that place at the mention of which my mother had always turned up her eyes and shaken her dear head; that fair target at which every Puritan from the days of William Prynne has fired a shot. It was with a strange sinking at the heart that I answered, "I think that I should like to go, if it's not wrong."

Mr. Markingham favoured me with his dry laugh.

"Wrong! The stage warns, counsels, holds the mirror up to nature, and teaches us our lessons of humanity pleasantly, which is not a virtue common to teaching in general."

"If——"

"You are your own master. Is the shadow of the parson to frighten you now, lad?"

"No."

"You haven't left him behind, and yet brought his starched notions to London with you?" continued the tempter.

"No—I'll go."

"I do not believe that there was anything wrong in my decision; pious people would have told me that it was my first step downwards; friends with more liberal minds would not

have seen the harm in it. Mr. Markingham, a scholar, a thinker, and philosopher, had said the stage teaches, warns, and counsels, and men more clever than he have endorsed that opinion. Much has been written for and against the stage, and will be written till there are no more actors to strut their mimic hour, and the foot-lights are turned out for ever.

Still my heart *did* sink as my companion pointed to the bills with his stick and said, "Take your choice;" and a slight suspicion crossed my mind that the philosopher by my side was not exactly a fit companion for a young, thoughtless, and impressionable lad.

He might be a clever and a good-hearted man; Mr. Bowden was both, and yet he had ruined my temper with undue severity. Was this easy freethinker, and Mr. Bowden's very antithesis, to take the opposite side and help to ruin me too?

"Now which is it to be?" said Mr. Markingham. "The Olympic and the '*Artful Dodger*,' the Adelphi and '*The Owl Sisters*,' or the *Haunted Abbey*?'——"

"I think I should like that!" I interrupted eagerly.

"Ah! striking name, is it not?" remarked Mr. Markingham; "but if we are going to the theatre on instructive principles, or to have our minds expanded, I doubt if the '*Owl Sisters*,' although I have no objection to the company of ladies, is the exact thing for us. Neither," with a glance at the bills again, "is Mr. Paul Bedford as *Norma* an edifying sight, though rather amusing for the first two minutes. Here's Covent Garden, and Adelaide Kemble as *Semiramide*, and here is Old Drury. Ah! we'll go to Drury Lane, and see Macready in '*As You Like It*.' Are you agreeable?"

"Yes."

"My philosophy tells me that I can see very well in the gallery; and as it is the cheapest part of the house, and we have no friends to disgust with our low tastes, why, I think it will suit both us and our pockets. Quick march, Woodleigh junior; we are late."

Mr. Markingham put his long legs to their proper use that evening, and we made for Drury Lane Theatre in dashing style. Mr. Markingham, I soon discovered, was a constant play-goer; he knew something about every play, ancient and modern, that had ever been written; he knew stories of actors and actresses, and all the scandal about them, from Betterton and Mrs. Barry's time downwards, and he communicated, during our walk, a few

of his liveliest anecdotes, at which I laughed out of compliment, though the point of each joke seemed rather a dull one.

We were before the gallery door of Drury Lane Theatre at last. It was not yet open, and there was a crowd half across the street—a densely packed crowd—at the very sight of which I shuddered. Mr. Markingham and I took our posts at the back, and other pleasure-seekers came and stood beside us and around us, hemming us in their midst, and making respiration a task of difficulty.

“This is rather a large crowd, is it not?” I asked of my companion.

“There was a larger this day week, when the house opened for the season. Keep your arms down now and go with the tide—they are unfastening the doors.”

The doors opened, and a grand rush towards them followed. I *did* keep my arms down, for there was no possibility of getting them up, and I certainly went with the tide—rather fast too, and in rather a confused manner. Never-to-be-forgotten Saturday night, when I made my first step from Methodism, and went to Drury Lane Theatre with Mr. Markingham. Never-to-be-forgotten crowd of the lower orders, pushing, struggling, fighting, swearing, as it made for the crooked gallery stairs, bearing me with it, driving sharp elbows into my side, smashing my feet, pressing the breath out of my body, tearing my collar, jamming me against hard corners, and squeezing me out of all natural proportion.

I was almost insensible when the money-taker’s box was passed, and Mr. Markingham and I were on the stone staircase.

“Oh! I’m so ill.”

“You’ll be better when you are in the gallery,” said Markingham, passing his arm through mine, and trotting me up the stairs. “Look sharp!”

In the crowded gallery at last, perched on a back seat, with a sloping field of heads before me, a deafening noise in my ears, and a swimming in my eyes. It was ten minutes before I was able to look round me satisfactorily, and to inform Mr. Markingham that I was “better now.”

“It’s a hard struggle on grand nights,” said he. “I have been nearly mangled to death in my time. It would not be philosophy to fight one’s way to the top shelf here, if there were plenty of money in the purse—heigho!”

“I don’t think that I shall come very often.”

“Wait till you can come in style—opera-glass, white kids,

and bouquets for the ladies ; I have done all that in 'auld lang syne,' and was not half as happy. Pooh ! how warm it is ; philosophy says the removal of the upper garment would moderate the heat of the body, and here are plenty of gentlemen in shirt-sleeves to set us an example ; but somehow I cannot fancy that, even *now* ! ”

When the curtain was drawn up I forgot all my regrets—all about mother, step-father, and the Methodists. I sat entranced by Markingham's side, and gazed at the new world before me, thinking what a fine thing it was to be an actor and wear such very smart clothes.

Grand play-house times they were in those days—old playgoers may well mourn them. Grand assemblage of stars that Saturday night in Shakespere's immortal comedy—stars which have long since wandered from their orbits and gone various ways ; some to private life, some far away across seas, some to stage business for themselves, many to their journey's end and the last scene of all.

How strong the spell grew, as act after act passed away ! Well that the stage is *sometimes* a moral teacher, for great is the attraction and charm there ; better still if it had always in view the lessons it might teach, and the follies it might disperse.

I forgot Mr. Markingham, forgot everything but William the Immortal. When the curtain was drawn up I was far gone in “As You Like It” (and I did like it exceedingly) ; when the act-drop was down I was calculating when I should be able to come to Drury Lane again, and be nearly jammed to death on the gallery stairs. But all things have an end : the play was over, the last words were spoken, the curtain fell, Macready and Mrs. Nisbett had responded to the general call of “the house,” and Mr. Markingham was shaking me by the arm.

“Are you ready ?”

“Is it ALL over ?”

“There is nothing worth waiting for. A vaudeville comedy, or something which is not deserving the attention of sensible fellows like us.”

“I am ready.”

Ten minutes afterwards we were in the cool streets, and two hours had not passed before I was in my bed in the three-pair back, dreaming of “As You Like It” over again, with Mr. Markingham on my right hand, and Mr. Bowden on my left, applauding everything.

Thus ended my first day in London, and thus began my career therein.

Was I beginning my new life well or badly? Had all things turned out for the best? Was London a fair exchange for Nettleton—Stephen Markingham for Jacob Bowden?

Time, that answereth all questions and solveth all mysteries, was to decide; the hand of the runaway could not draw aside the curtain which hid the future from view. There were new friends at my side, new faces to meet, new studies to begin. Everything that was old and had been tried in the past I had abjured.

It would be a hard life of mine, that new one; there would be much to put up with, much of evil to fight against, many troubles and temptations to withstand, or succumb to, before the sun rose on my fortunes, or my fortunes led to that darkness which no sun ever pierced.

CHAPTER V

TWO YEARS.

I DESIGN this chapter as a record of two years. Two years devoid of interest to him who dips idly into books, or seeks but excitement from their pages,—years which helped to form my character, and passed by more quickly than any that succeeded.

For that period of time I retained my place at Uncle Woodleigh's, not without difficulty, and not altogether with satisfaction to myself. My old tempers, my obstinacy, my fits of petulance, the secret envy at the bottom of my heart, were all enemies I had to fight with, and to keep from troubling others.

The earliest evidence I afforded Uncle Woodleigh and his son of my excitable temperament was in a regular stand-up fight with Mr. Watkinson the clerk, about six months after my first appearance in the counting-house. Mr. Watkinson was of an overbearing disposition, and a perfect specimen of the Jack-in-office. If he had only been a Somerset House clerk, what a fine opportunity he would have had to distinguish himself! Mr. Watkinson was a young man full of objections; he had long since objected to my presence in the office, to my

looking after the interests of my employer, to my being sharp at "the books," to my pointing out a few errors in names, places, and dates on the order list, to Cousin Upton conversing with me at times: he had objected to so many things, and in so rude and tyrannical a manner, that at last, forgetting our difference of age and the respect due to office hours, and furthermore aggravated by his pulling my hair and calling me "a sneaking young bungler," I made a rush at him, and had it out at once. Mr. Watkinson was a weak young man for his age, and I was nearly his match. He was rather frightened at my desperate onset, but he gathered courage after two lively rounds, and we were in the midst of a sharp encounter, with the ledger, pens, and inkstand on the floor, and one office stool in the fire-place, when Mr. Woodleigh rushed into the counting-house.

Mr. Woodleigh, who was a hasty man, as well as a man of business, gave us both a week's warning on the spot; but cooling down next day, condescended to inquire into the origin of the quarrel.

Mr. Watkinson made his statement, and I made mine. Mr. Watkinson, who was of a mendacious turn of mind, told so many falsehoods (he had informed me on the day of our first meeting that Mr. Woodleigh lived at Grove House, Tottenham, instead of Grove House, Fiddington), that my plain statement of the facts was quite a virtuous defence in contrast; and so Mr. Watkinson went his way, and I remained. It was singular that that incident, which had threatened to turn out badly, was the means of starting me in life with better prospects. Alone in the office after Mr. Watkinson's dismissal, I did that gentleman's work whilst Mr. Woodleigh was advertising for a clerk. Alone, with no one to cross me, and not quite a dunce (thanks to Mr. Bowden), I fulfilled my responsible duties to the satisfaction of uncle and cousin—so much to their satisfaction, that Upton suggested I should be kept at the work a few weeks longer.

In those few weeks I did my best, being quick enough to see that my position might be benefited thereby. I worked hard and earnestly, and the result was that I became office clerk in Uncle Woodleigh's service, with a salary of twenty-five shillings a week, and a prospect of an early increase.

I did not save a great deal of money out of my income; I was never of a saving turn. I increased my stock of clothes,

became extravagant in neckties, went more frequently to the play,—spent my money as became a gentleman.

My acquaintance with my relations did not improve in those two years; they kept me at a distance, and though I made no sign, I felt the slight acutely. It seemed to me very strange and unnatural that my uncle and cousins should think themselves too grand for me, should almost forget that I was a relation at all. Probably my uncle did forget it; his soul was in his business, and he had too much upon his mind to think of the nephew in his counting-house. From six in the morning to six at night he was always raving mad with excitement, rushing about the yard, shouting at the men, swearing at them occasionally, driving in cabs from one railway terminus to another, worrying himself and all nervous persons in his employ to perfect skeletons. Cousin Upton had a great many of his father's traits in his character—he was as shrewd and quick, and certainly a better man of business; he took things coolly, made a less number of mistakes, and was more clever with his pen. He was kind to me in his way too; he did not patronise me, or I should have given warning, or flung the account-books at him; and he called me cousin sometimes. Once or twice, after I had become clerk in the office, he said:—

“We must have you up at Paddington when my brother comes home from college and my mother and sisters return from their travels.”

But either they never came home, or their arrival did not remind him of his promise, for the remainder of the two years, of which this chapter is a retrospect, passed without an invitation.

My acquaintance with Mr. Stephen Markingham had made great progress during those two years—we had become the best of friends. Still there was one thing to dislike in Mr. Markingham, and that was the “Diogenes humour,” which he had mentioned on the evening I first called at Barker Street. When that attacked him he was a disagreeable being, a cold, sarcastic, ill-tempered man, who found fault with everything, and sneered at everything that was good and virtuous. I had been once or twice during those two years the object of his bitter attacks, and had rushed out of his room, vowing to cross the threshold no more; but his humour seldom lasted long, and his gracious manner after the fit was over soon wore off the effect.

He was attached to me; he took pains to teach me a little

of his general knowledge, and he became partial to chess and cribbage on a winter's evening. He was a strange man; he appeared to have no friends, he never talked of his relations, and he lived up to the very last penny of his income, which he made no secret of confessing to be exactly ninety pounds per annum, a sum that he divided into exactly fifty-two portions, and spent one every week. Sunday was his grand day for excursions into the country, and Sunday at first was my day for attending divine service at a little Methodist chapel in the neighbourhood. But Mr. Markingham's bad example soon affected me; the chapel became irregularly attended, and I found the excursions into the country with Mr. Markingham an agreeable change. Sunday evenings, too, when Mr. Markingham was absent, were for strolling full dressed into the parks, and looking after the girls, as became a youth nearly seventeen years of age, who had taken to a frock-coat, and a stand-up collar which hurt his ears. My two years had seen a change in my position; I was getting on in the world; my salary was rising—not that it mattered much, for I spent all my money, and the three-pair back had been exchanged for the room adjoining Mr. Markingham's.

And in the two years of that life which drifted by so quietly, which I took so calmly and profited in so little, what of the friends I had deserted? I had written to my mother again, telling her my address, of the kindness of my uncle, of my situation, and of the new friend I had made, and she had answered me in a long letter of four pages, crossed and re-crossed, and nearly undecipherable. Her letter was full of regrets and forgiveness for my late conduct; full of prayers, too, that I would strive to be good, to deserve my uncle's kindness, and resist every temptation to folly and wickedness. She mentioned Mr. Bowden, told me that he mourned over my obduracy, and regretted that I had not spoken of earning my own living, in lieu of leaving home and my best friends in so reckless a manner. My mother did not ask me to return; she knew my nature too well to think that I would consent, and perhaps Mr. Bowden thought a little buffeting with the world would bring me to my senses.

My mother and I corresponded frequently after that letter (I had not left off loving my mother because I had deserted her), and I received all the news of Nettleton in exchange for my little confidential notes.

At the end of those two years my mother came to see me.

It was an autumn evening; my philosophical friend and I had the chess-board between us at the window, for the advantage of the little daylight left, when my mother came panting up the stairs. The door of the room was open, and she halted on the threshold, looked in, and, after an effort to recover her breath, asked which was Mr. Woodleigh's room.

I jumped from my seat, and upset the chess-board and men into Mr. Markingham's lap—that dear, old, well-known voice.

“What, mother!”

The buxom figure in the doorway started, the rosy colour on the cheeks vanished, the basket in the hand was dropped, there was a short gurgling sob, and then my mother was in my arms.

“Oh! Robert, it *is* you, then,” my mother cried. “My dear, dear boy, I am so glad to see you!”

I turned away my head, I stared over my shoulder at the doorway, I looked upon the well-remembered pattern of the straw bonnet and brown ribbons, I glanced askance at Mr. Markingham, but I could not keep the tears away, they brimmed over and went rolling down my cheeks. Poor mother! how she sobbed, and yet how happy she was, with the runaway pressed to her bosom as tightly as if she never meant to let him go again. No reproaches, no talk of my old misdeeds—which were stabbing me to the heart then—nothing but delight at seeing me.

She released me at last, dropped into the first vacant chair, and, holding my hand in hers, looked at me from out her swimming eyes.

“I should hardly have known you, Robert,” she said, her voice still trembling; “you have so altered, grown so tall, so, so——”

“Good looking, Ma'am,” suggested Mr. Markingham.

“Yes, Sir, exactly,” responded my mother, turning to my friend; “he has improved, and he *is* good looking, very. His poor father said he would be, when he was quite a baby.”

“What nonsense!” said I, colouring.

“Oh! he knows it well enough, Mrs. Woodleigh; you should see him at the looking-glass every morning; it's painful.”

“And you, Sir, I presume, are Mr. Markingham?”

“At your service, Ma'am,” with a courteous bow.

“I hope you do not find my Robert troublesome, Sir. He's a very good boy—docile, and easy to manage, and—oh! dear me, I forgot.”

My mother's blank look caused Mr. Markingham to stare intently into Barker Street.

"And what is the news down at Nettleton, mother?" I asked.

"Well, my dear boy, there's a great deal of news; I hardly know where to begin. We've had a new pulpit in the chapel—walnut-wood, my dear—presented to your father by the congregation."

"How very kind!"

"And old Mrs. Arrow is dead, and Tom will come into all her money when he is of age—poor racketsy lad! what ducks and drakes he will make of it!"

"How is he?"

"Well, I don't know, Robert. I believe he has left Nettleton and come to London. Oh! my dear boy, I hope that he will not find you out."

"And the Heberdeens, mother?"

"Mrs. Heberdeen is very ill, and not expected to live one day after another, poor lady, and—good gracious!"

Mr. Markingham, who had replaced the chess-board and men on the table, suddenly knocked them over again, and sprung to his feet.

"Your pardon, Madam; this room is very hot to-night, and—I fear I am intruding upon this happy meeting of mother and son. Robert, don't think of going—pray remain here; your own room is very small. I shall not be back till late. Good-evening."

Mr. Markingham was gone.

"What a singular man!" exclaimed my mother.

"A good man, mother."

"Rather abrupt, I think; but very kind of him to leave us to ourselves. But now tell me of your uncle and cousins; I am very anxious to know all about them, and as I must go back to-morrow morning by the first train, we have not a minute to spare, dear. Your landlady has a vacant bed for me, so I shall not have to run about any more to-night."

I told her all I knew concerning my relations, and my mother was quite surprised to hear that I was not asked every Sunday to my uncle's; and, had time permitted, would probably have gone with me to business in the morning to inquire the reason.

After the news had been exhausted on both sides, Mrs. Bants brought in lights and my mother's basket, which had been dropped on the landing in the first moment of recognition.

When Mrs. Bants had retired, my mother opened the basket and covered the table with packages.

"There's some tea, dear, and here's a pot of jam—you were fond of my red currant jam once, Robert—and this is your congregational hymn-book, which you forgot to take away with you; and these," taking up a large packet, and laying it down again, "are some books which your father has selected for your perusal, and that," indicating large packet No. 2, "is the Grook's pills you asked for in your last letter."

"I asked for, mother?"

"Well, perhaps I mentioned it myself in *my* last letter—it's of no consequence, my dear. Here they are, and I hope you won't neglect them."

The evening passed away, and the morning hurried my mother back to Nettleton, whither she went with a great load off her heart. She had found me well, in what she considered good hands, and with a prospect of getting on in the world; therefore, her long-looked-for journey to London had done her a vast amount of good.

"Keep steady, my darling boy—don't spend all your money; go regularly to chapel, and read a little of your Bible every day—now *do!*"

So, with these last injunctions, accompanied by fifty kisses and a hundred blessings, mother and son parted once more.

So the two years came to an end, and the circle of my acquaintance widened not. Stephen Markingham, the philosopher, was my home companion, as in the beginning of that era, and Uncle Woodleigh and Cousin Upton were the only relations whom I had seen since I had entered their service. Had my aunt and cousins returned from their tour on the continent, and was it their pride, their wish, that kept the doors of Grove House barred against me?—kept me to the wearisome desk work, the long rows of figures, and the strange morbid thoughts that sometimes perplexed me—thoughts of the world before me, and whether it was to be always the same dull, quiet, lead-coloured world? of the life beyond, whether it was to be the same still and methodical life, to run on for ever in one uneventful channel, with nothing to unsettle it or direct it from its course?

But the still waters were running deep, and bearing me on to new hopes and new cares.

BOOK IV.

MY RELATIONS.

"Some say love,
Foolish love,
Doth rule and govern all the gods:
I say love,
Inconstant love,
Sets men's senses far at odds."

ROBERT GREENE.

"*Mal.* May it besecme a wise man to be in love?
Fice. Let wise men alone, 'twill besecme thee and me
well enough."

JOHN MARSTON.

CHAPTER I.

COUSINS.

JANUARY, 1845. A bright wintry morning. A fire burning cheerfully in the counting-house of James Woodleigh, railway carrier ; a clock in the corner ticking its way to eleven ; a clerk, one Robert Woodleigh, late of Nettleton, at his post on the long-legged stool before the desk and account-books.

I, Robert Woodleigh, had the counting-house, long-legged stool, desk, and account-books all to myself, Mr. Woodleigh, senior, having started into the country in search of another contract, Cousin Upton being at the railway station, and the new office boy, who had been sent post-haste with a letter, enjoying himself in the next street with a tribe of ragamuffins and a Punch and Judy.

I was not in working humour that morning ; the weather was cold, the long-legged stool was several yards from the fire-place, and uncle and cousin were not there to overlook me. I put my pen behind my ear, insinuated my hands into my pockets, and fell into a brown study, from which it took two taps on the office door to arouse me—the last a smart one, the person without having evidently become impatient.

“Come in. Hollo !”

The last exclamation escaped me before I had time to recover my surprise.

“Is Mr. Upton Woodleigh within ?”

The new comer was a lady of about the middle height, a lady with a prominent forehead, beneath which shone a pair of large and lustrous eyes. A young lady who was thin and pale, and yet, somehow, pretty ; not a lady with a belle-of-the-season face, but still one to be struck with at first sight, and—to pick to pieces afterwards ! There was not a perfect feature within the little velvet bonnet—the eyes were too large, too disproportionate, the nose was small and sharp, and the lips were thin and of a vixenly closeness that suggested suspicions of a small amount of amiability, or a large amount of decision, firmness, obstinacy,—whichever you like, my dear lady readers ; I believe it is all the same.

She gave a quick glance round the counting-house and changed her question.

"Will it be long before Mr. Upton returns?"

The lady was rather abrupt, and my dignity was ruffled in consequence. I was quite a young man—eighteen next November, and it would not have taken a great deal more time to have added, "Sir," to question No. 2!

"Mr. Upton, I believe, will not be long, Miss. Will you call again, or will you—ahem?"

I was about to add, "take a chair," but remembering there was but Upton's office stool to offer her, four feet high at least, I stopped the suggestion by a cough before I had committed myself.

"There is no occasion for us to call again—I think it will be better to wait. You say that he will not be long?"

"He said he would return before eleven, Miss," I replied.

"Then I think we'll wait."

"*We!*" What did she mean by "*we?*" Was she the editor of a magazine, or a new partner introduced into the firm? Whilst considering these questions, the strange lady solved the mystery by re-opening the office door and addressing some person or persons outside.

"He's not within."

"Oh, dear! how disappointing," answered a soft musical voice—a voice that set me listening attentively.

"The clerk tells me that he promised to return before eleven."

"Then we'll come in and wait."

There was laughing, whispering, a rustling of dresses; the lady with whom I had exchanged a few words stepped aside to allow ingress to two more ladies—both young, both pretty, both cosily wrapped in furs as a preventive against the January frosts. I caught myself sliding off the long-legged stool, and bowing this influx of fair faces into the office. I felt my cheeks flushing, my ears tingling, and was conscious of a strong sensation of choking in the throat.

The two last comers were my cousins; I was sure of it, although time had made young women of them, and altered every feature since I had seen them last. I knew them both in an instant—which was Caroline and which was Constance. Caroline was the tall one, with the fair hair and the Upton Woodleigh look, and she with the hair a shade more dark, yet fair-haired also—she with the ringlets, the laughing blue eyes, the peach bloom on the cheeks, was Constance—Constance

the Sunny-face, as her doting father used to call her nine years ago. I wondered if he ever called her "Sunny-face" now, supposing that his business allowed him time to call her anything?

My position was becoming embarrassing; my cousins did not know me. Uncle Woodleigh had probably not mentioned the relationship between him and his clerk; I was a stranger to them—the ghost of a bow from my cousin just acknowledged the existence of an unimportant being in the vicinity and that was all.

The lady with the prominent forehead—the first who had intruded upon the sacred precincts of office—broke the silence by addressing my cousins.

"I am afraid, ladies, that you will have to stand."

"I am not tired," responded the elder sister, and, "I could stand all day to wait for dear old Upton," remarked my Cousin Constance.

Caroline Woodleigh was a sharp young woman, and without a doubt had an eye to her father's interest; for, glancing at me, she remarked:—

"I hope that we are not hindering you from business, young man."

"Oh, no! not at all, thank you," said I, mounting the office stool, and making a savage scratch with my pen. I was an ill-tempered, foolish fellow, and actually angry with my cousins for not knowing me! Perhaps they did know me? That was a thought which checked me in a preliminary flourish, and set my teeth grinding away like millstones. If I could be only sure they had recognised me, and were showing off their airs of superiority over their poor relation, I would get off my office stool, and leave them alone in their glory. I began to make very fierce down-strokes, and to scowl ferociously at the ledger. Meanwhile, the ladies conversed in a low tone.

"How surprised Upton will be," said Constance; "and how delighted to see us again. Oh! I hope he will not be long!"

"It is nearly eleven now," said Caroline, looking at the clock over the mantelpiece.

"Perhaps he will not know us," cried Constance, with a merry little laugh. "Do you think two years' travelling have altered us very much, Miss Bowden?"

Bowden! I twirled round on my stool and looked at the lady addressed. Bowden, Bowden! Could it really be *his* daughter? There was a likeness—that prominent forehead

was suspicious. Oh, yes ! there was the Bowden look. She was the lost daughter of my Methodist step-father !

The large eyes met mine, and made me flinch. Such a steady, searching, I-wonder-at-your-impudence look !

"Did you speak, Sir ? " she asked, quietly.

"No, Mum—Miss."

I twirled back to my original position, and wrote in the ledger, "January 14th. Delivered to Miss Bowden, two tons of pig-iron !"

"I am sure that we are disturbing this young man," suggested my eldest cousin. "I think we had better wait for Upton at the gates, Constance."

"Not disturbing me at all, Miss Woodleigh," I muttered, over the ledger.

My cousins exchanged glances, and I heard Constance whisper. "He knows we are Upton's sisters, Carry."

"I suppose he thinks sisters have only a right to enter a brother's office in this unceremonious manner," was the answer.

They did not know me, then ; there was a satisfaction in being convinced of that fact, and I returned to my accounts with a mind more at ease.

The clock ticked on, struck eleven, and no Upton. The sisters stood and talked to Miss Bowden and each other, criticised the office and its furniture, criticised me, I believe, in a lower tone, for there was a great deal of suppressed laughter from Cousin Constance. Although I had affirmed that the presence of the ladies was no hindrance to business, it was quite evident that I was not getting on very rapidly, and that the entries in the great ledger were not so accurate as they might have been. Three ladies, chatting in a study, may give life and animation to the scene, but are slightly calculated to disturb the ideas of the student in the corner, especially when one of the ladies is as full of vivacity as "sweet seventeen" should be.

And she was very merry *then*, was Constance Woodleigh ; life lay before her in the brightest of colours, and there was nothing from her point of view to cast a shade over the landscape. Pretty flower of home, a favourite with father, mother, brothers, and sisters ; health, wealth, and content to surround her ; friends to love her and make much of her, what was to stand before her, in the outset of life, and check her in that happy spring time which comes once to us all ?

How light-hearted she was that day ! her good spirits were contagious, and put everybody in the best of tempers ; and had it

not been for my bashfulness and my sense of decorum in office-hours, I could have jumped from my stool and run with extended hands to my cousins to assert my relationship.

Upton Woodleigh arrived at ten minutes past eleven; he came in after his own and his father's bustling manner, and hung up his hat and slipped off his great-coat before he was conscious of the feminine invasion. His face lighted up when he made the discovery, and instantly his sisters were both in his arms, in one delightful heap.

"Well, I'm very glad to see you girls—I'm precious glad you are back again!" said he, kissing them; "two years have seemed like twenty-two without you. How well you are looking, Caroline—and Constance is grown out of all knowledge—and how's mother? is her health better?" he asked, anxiously; "has all this travelling done her any good, now?"

"She is much better, Upton," replied Caroline; "she hopes you will leave business to-day very early. We could hardly dissuade her from accompanying us."

"I'll leave at once. Robert can manage well enough. I'll run home directly."

He was out of his sisters' arms and in his great-coat and hat again with pantomimic celerity.

"When will papa return?" inquired Constance.

"To-morrow. He went down to Bristol two days earlier than he intended, in order to be home by Thursday—you said that we were to expect you on Thursday, Constance."

"That was my stratagem," she answered, with that musical, heart-thrilling laugh again, "I wished to come home and take you by surprise."

"How deceitful you are growing, Constance," said Upton; "what do you think, Miss Bowden, is it quite right in a young lady, seventeen next month, to play these tricks and tell these stories? When she was under your tuition, with little Mary, you would not have allowed this conduct, I am sure."

Miss Bowden smiled in a grim manner that reminded me of her father, and replied:

"Miss Clewly, I have no doubt, has paid every attention to Miss Constance—she is a lady in whom every confidence can be placed."

This was taking a joke in a literal sense, and as Miss Bowden looked grave and pursed her lips, there was a slight appearance of discomfiture on the face of Upton Woodleigh.

"Oh! of course," said he; "I was only joking, you know."

I did not mean to **cast any reflections on** Constance's governess—far from it."

"Mother's travelling-companion, you mean. Upon dear," Constance **corrected**.

"Of course I mean that too," said Upon: "what a many mistakes I am making this morning to be sure! You are everything that is elegant and accomplished by this time, Constance, and quite out of the leading-strings of the governesses of England: who can doubt it? Well, let us be off—look sharp **after** the man, Rob——"

He stopped, glanced from me to his sisters, scratched his head, and burst out into a laugh.

"Don't you know?" he said, turning to his sisters. "Haven't you told them?" wheedling round to me.

"Know what?" said the sisters Woodleigh, and "No, I haven't; **what** was the good of it?" I answered.

"Did I not mention it in one of my letters. **Carry?**" asked Upon. "I certainly intended."

"Mention what?" exclaimed Carry, becoming impatient; "**how tiresome** you are!"

"That this young gentleman," pointing to me, "is Mr. Robert Woodleigh, from Newton, a first cousin of ours, who has given up the country for the hard **London** stones—Rob, come off that stool and show yourself!"

I was soon shaking hands with my cousins, and answering fifty questions about Newton, my mother and myself.

"And why did you not tell us that you were Cousin Robert?" asked Constance, after I had replied to several of their questions, and told them my mother was well and married again.

"Well, I hardly know," I stammered. "I thought it might frighten you, Miss Constance, and I was not quite certain——"

"Of what?"

"Whether you would be glad to see me!"

"Why not?"

"I don't know—it was only a silly thought of mine. I am glad to find that you have not forgotten me."

Caroline changed the subject by reverting to her former questions.

"And so Ann Woodleigh is married again—to a gentleman?"

"To a minister—a Methodist."

Miss Bowden started.

"Oh, indeed; I am glad to hear she has made so good a

match—what is his—why, my dear Miss Bowden, how pale you are ! ”

“ Am I ? ” she answered, calmly.

“ Do you feel faint ? ”

“ No, Miss Woodleigh, I feel very well, thank you. It’s getting late ; your mother will be anxious about us.”

“ Perhaps this room is too warm for you after the cold air,” said Constance. “ Shall we see about returning ? ”

“ Pray do not hurry on my account,” coolly replied Miss Bowden ; “ you were about to ask a question of your cousin—your aunt’s husband’s name, I think. I believe, Mr. Woodleigh,”—turning to me—“ the gentleman’s name is Bowden ? ”

“ That is his name Miss,” I answered

“ I thought I was right—Mr. Bowden, a relation of mine.” *

“ How singular ! ” exclaimed my female cousins.

“ Two years ago, I heard from strangers that he was married,” said Miss Bowden ; “ but I had no idea the happy bride was allied to friends of mine. Yes, Mr. Bowden is a relation, and a good and devout man too.”

“ Rather firm, perhaps,” added Upton, with a sly glance that assured me my story of two years since was still remembered.

“ Yes, *rather* firm,” I answered.

“ And inclined to his own opinion, eh, Robert ? ”

“ Mr. Bowden is a relation of mine, Mr. Upton,” said Miss Bowden, with some asperity ; “ and I cannot think him the most becoming subject for a jest in my presence.”

“ Ten thousand pardons,” cried Upton. “ I would not hurt your feelings for the world ; and I no more consider a good man a proper subject for a jest than you do yourself, Miss Bowden. I hope that I have not pained you ? ”

“ No,” with a forced smile ; “ I merely called your attention to my proximity. Perhaps I am too particular, too captious—I have brought my governess airs out with me this morning. I am ready, ladies.”

My cousins shook hands with me, Caroline expressing her satisfaction at meeting me again, Constance, who was younger and less self-possessed, saying nothing but “ good-day,” and Upton bestowing on me a friendly nod, and adding, “ Back again in the afternoon, Robert.” As for Miss Bowden, although I held the door open for her, and said “ good-morning ” in my best manner, she drew herself up stiffly and swept out of the office, without so much as a bend of the head in my direction.

When they were gone, and I was alone again, my old vicious

discontented feelings began to rise within me—my sense of slight to become painfully acute.

"The old story," I muttered; "the poor cousin is good enough to say 'good-day' to,—to exchange a few silly words with about the weather, my mother, or the old times; but he is too low in the scale to be treated as a friend and an equal. Every word they say, and every act they do, implies I am the servant, and our difference of position sinks the ties of kindred."

Well, and if all that I was brooding over had been as true as Gospel, would it have been a fair subject to grumble at? Rich people are never very fond of their poor relations, and it is not one of the manners and customs of the English to single them out, walk arm-in-arm with them, and introduce them to the circle of the select.

Everybody well-to-do in the world has a poor relation, and that relation is a lucky fellow to get patronised at all, and an ungrateful mortal to grow morbid and sarcastic because the patroniser has had the start of him up the greasy pole—that greasy, slippery pole of life—and got the leg of mutton first!

Bah! that is a low comparison, worthy of a young man fond of fireworks, fighting, and Nettleton Fair.

I was wrong in my calculations, however. There was no pride in the Woodleighs; they had sprung from small beginnings, and, *mirabile dictu*, had not forgotten the date of their rise; they knew the value of money and the position that money gave them, possibly; but a family less pretentious under the circumstances, I have never met in my experience of life.

When Upton returned in the afternoon, he resolved all my doubts, set at rest all my jealous scruples, by his very first speech.

"I say, Robert, you are to come to Grove House next Sunday, the girls will not listen to a word of denial. Dick will be home on Sunday, too; so it will be worth your while to come to Paddington now. Consider yourself booked, old fellow."

"Thank you."

"You will come?"

"What is the good of troubling Grove House with my presence, Upton?—I'm not fit for grand society."

"Oh! you will be quite at home. You will not find any of us of the stuck-up genus—we are as matter-of-fact, homely people as ever we were."

"I'll come, then."

"We dine at four; and if I should not mention it again, Robert, don't take offence and stop away."

"Business makes you forgetful," said I, drily.

He laughed.

"I certainly omitted to mention your name to my mother and sisters in my letters, and it was no good telling Miss Bowden, was it?"

"No," I answered; "and this Miss Bowden, is she a governess?"

"She is little Mary's governess—was once Constance's."

"Do you like her?" I asked.

"Yes, I do," said Upton, frankly, "though she's a queer girl, rather fond of sulking and taking offence, like, like—hanged if I know whom she is like, unless it's Cousin Robert!"

"Am I a sulky being, then?"

"Sometimes; and Miss Bowden is only 'sometimes,' of course," said Upton; "she's an eccentric girl, but nobody can help liking her, or making her a favourite; she's sharp, clever, and fond of little Mary. Miss Bowden has been housekeeper as well as governess since ill health compelled my mother to leave England, and a first-rate manager she has been, upon my word. Still, she has her faults, bumping ones, and if little Mary did not like her better than mother, father, or any of us, I think that she would have left Grove House long ago. However, we begin to understand her now, and she's as good-hearted a little spitfire as ever lived, after all."

"Who is Miss Clewly?"

"She was Constance's governess abroad, now she is mother's companion; presently, she will be nowhere on the establishment of the Woodleights, or I don't know Miss Amelia Bowden."

"Indeed!"

"Two of a trade never agree, and Miss B. will—but this is old woman's tattle! Whatever would the governor think of me—his steady, business-loving boy, as he told somebody once—gossiping and backbiting in this outrageous style? Where's a pen? where's that boy Jack, I wonder?—here, hollo there," flinging up the window and shouting to the men across the yard—"look alive with that van, or you'll be too late for the train, sleepy heads!"

CHAPTER II.

A FRIENDLY WARNING.

"IF I were you, friend Woodleigh, I should decline the honour," observed Mr. Markingham, after I had informed him of the invitation which I had received for the ensuing Sunday.

Mr. Markingham was at home in attitude on the sofa, his faded dressing-gown wrapped round him, and the stem of his favourite meerschaum pipe between his lips.

"Decline it, Sir?" I repeated.

"There's not philosophy in accepting the invitation," said he, "not philosophy in stepping into a false position and making yourself uncomfortable. Tradesmen as these Woodleighs are, still they are above you, and move in a sphere of which you know nothing. You," with one of his sneers, "are from the country!"

"Never mind that," I replied; "I have a friend who has mixed in first-rate society, and he will give me a few lessons in manners before I set forth."

"Perhaps so," said Mr. Markingham; "that friend will consider your hint, which is not a bad one. Have you made up your mind to go?"

"Yes."

"Have you reflected that it is not in your nature to take kindly to grand people, relations or no relations?" he continued.

"I have not thought a great deal about it yet."

"That your highness may become dissatisfied with your clerkship, with No. 2, Barker Street, even with the gentleman in the two-pair front?"

"Am I so discontented a being?"

"All that is amiable and lovable, my dear Sir, at present," he answered. "Still, discontent may seize you, and that same discontent is a man of the mountain that is not to be shaken off in a hurry! How many cousins have you?"

"Six."

"A large tribe—what are their names, Woodleigh?"

"Caroline, Constance, and Mary — Richard, Upton, and John."

Mr. Markingham took his pipe from his lips and reflected for several moments.

"And how old is Caroline?" he inquired at last.

"Twenty-three."

"And Mary and Constance?"

"Mary was ten last December, and——"

"You are well up in their ages, Robert—but I interrupt you."

"And Constance is seventeen next month."

"Ah! take care of *that* cousin!"

I laughed.

"Seventeen, and a first cousin—is she pretty, Robert?"

"Yes—I think so."

"The Humane Society ought to label her 'Dangerous.' Now, Robert the reckless, will you receive a little advice from—ahem—a philosopher?"

"With pleasure."

"Make up your mind to regard that young-lady cousin with the romantic name as something far above your reach. There is a familiarity between cousins that breeds ambitious hopes sometimes—*prenez garde!*"

"I am too young to fall in love," replied I, with a laugh, "and," with that old frown of mine, "I know my place well enough by this time."

"Don't indulge in visionary ideas of making a fortune and a name—of papa Woodleigh giving you his blessing, patting you on the back, and saying 'Take her, my boy—here's fifty thousand pounds to begin the world with;'—for there will come a waking from the dream, and a papa Woodleigh kicking you politely into the street."

Mr. Markingham did not refer again to the subject till the Sunday morning arrived and I was ready to depart.

"You will do," said he, after a critical survey of me, "and you might look a worse specimen of humanity for a youth nineteen next November."

"Eighteen next November."

"Only eighteen—how time crawls along, don't it?"

"Rather slowly."

"Ah! thoughtless youth in a hurry to get on in the world says that—men, past the Rubicon, cry 'Oh! Time, how swiftly you bear us on to Eternity!' Ahem! almost poetical, that will not do for sober philosophy. So you are off?"

"Yes."

"A pleasant day to you. I say—it's not a dinner-party, is it?"

"I hope not. What made you think of anything so awful, Mr. Markingham?"

"I don't know. I'm in a gloomy humour, and there is a rush of forebodings coming uppermost. You had better be off before I throw a wet blanket over your hopes of enjoyment. Good-day, and once again," with mock solemnity, "take care of that cousin, oh Woodleigh!"

I was soon in the street, marching towards Paddington. It was a fine day; the sun was shining and my spirits were light. I was going to spend the day with my cousins, and I had always liked my cousins, in my heart. I should see Dick once more, and the twins who were babies in arms when my mother went to Nettleton, and Caroline, and Constance surnamed the Sunny-face.

"Take care of that cousin!"

Strange warning words of Stephen Markingham, that were ringing in my ears all the way to Paddington, that made me smile, too, for I knew how foolish it would be for me to fall in love—me, a clerk with a small salary, a discontent, "a black sheep!"

The Fates led me on, marched side by side with me, winked at each other over my shoulder as I strode onwards, gay and light-hearted.

Looking back at the past, at that never forgotten Sunday from which dates many a folly, trouble and regret, I often wonder now how the world would have treated me if I had turned my back on Grove House, Paddington, and gone another way!



CHAPTER III.

GROVE HOUSE.

It was half-past three in the afternoon when I was standing in the shadow of the imposing portico of Grove House, Paddington, making up my mind to knock. Grove House was a stylish edifice of modern build, that came out strong in stucco-work and plate-glass windows. There was a large garden

and carriage-drive before the house, and I had walked slowly along the drive thinking of the luck which falls in some people's way. Here was Uncle Woodleigh, not a clever man, not a wonderful man for business, making money by hundreds every week, and living like a gentleman; and, in poor lodgings, down a back street in Chelsea, I had left behind a shrewd and clever man, one who seemed to know everything, and whose income was exactly ninety pounds per annum. Still, Mr. Markingham was not a fair example to quote—he might have done better had his philosophy of idleness allowed him; Mr. Bowden made a better contrast, for he was a hard worker and a clever man, too, and yet how low down he was in the scale!

Thinking of Mr. Bowden, it was somewhat singular to be shown into a room in which his daughter and a little girl were seated. It was more singular still, considering Miss Bowden's previous reserve, to find her bowing graciously and smiling like an angel. She had a peculiar smile, too; so soft and pleasing a one that, while it lasted, the expression of the face was wholly changed.

"Good-morning, Mr. Woodleigh."

"Good-morning, Miss Bowden."

"Pray be seated; your uncle will be here in a moment."

After taking a seat, looking round the room, admiring the pattern of the carpet, struggling with some natural boyish confusion of mine, I ventured to inquire if all my cousins were well.

"Quite well, thank you," said Miss Bowden in reply; "they have not yet returned from their walk."

I was growing more confused; Miss Bowden seemed to look at me steadfastly. Vague suspicions began to torture me. Was anything the matter? Had my collar come undone, my neckerchief disarranged, or had some London blacks settled on my shirt-front?

"Has Mr. Richard arrived?" I asked, after another long pause.

"Yes—he," with a second smile, "is at home—at least, I know nothing to the contrary."

Survey of the room again. The pattern of the carpet was rather large and showy, and the portrait of Mr. Woodleigh opposite was not a bit like him, it was much too flattering about the nose.

"Here is a little cousin of yours, Mr. Woodleigh," said

Miss Bowden, laying her hand on the dark curls of the child who clung shyly to her skirt. "Mary, dear, go and shake hands with your Cousin Robert."

Mary advanced and I shook hands with her. Mary hoped I was quite well, and I said "Yes, Mum, Miss," and then looked at the portrait again, at the carpet, and at the fire burning brightly in the steel grate opposite.

"Shall I tell papa my cousin has come?" I heard her whisper to her governess.

"No, dear."

A moment after, Miss Bowden probably withdrew her prohibition, for, after another whisper, my cousin Mary, regarding me with round staring eyes, sidled out of the room and left me alone with Miss Bowden. The door had hardly closed before Miss Bowden said quickly :—

"He is well, I hope?"

"Who, Miss Bowden?"

"My—your step-father."

"I beg pardon, but I did not hear you mention his name."

"Perhaps I did not mention it—he was in my thoughts, however—is he well?"

"Quite well, Miss Bowden, I believe."

She reflected a moment before she said in a low tone :—

"Are you aware of the nature of the relationship between us?"

"Yes."

"Have you written to your mother—to *him* lately?"

"No."

"Don't write a word concerning me to him," she said, in a hurried, excited voice; "it can do no good, for we are better separated. He thinks he can forget and forgive the past, but its shadow would ever darken our reunion."

"He has always spoken kindly of you, Miss Bowden—has always regretted——"

"Hush," she cried; "I know it, but I cannot restore him peace, and I will keep away. He is not alone now, and if your mother make him a good wife, be only of a loving, *obedient* nature, he is happy, and," she added bitterly, "I would not mar that happiness with *my* presence!"

"But——"

"Were you happy with him, Mr. Woodleigh?" she asked anxiously.

"No, Miss Bowden, I was not."

"You found him stern, harsh, unable to appreciate your motives, inclined to put a false construction on them, to—to—to—" she repeated rapidly, "interdict your wishes, hopes, ambitions, harmless though they were; because he, with his narrow mind, saw evil, or the coming of evil, in them. To—" she paused, her excitement suddenly vanished, the smiles returned, and she was once more the well-bred, self-possessed young lady; "but I am very foolish. What a time Mr. Woodleigh is!"

"Yes, but——"

"Don't hesitate for my sake," she said sharply; "you were about to speak of Mr. Bowden again."

"Yes," replied I, the colour mounting to my face; "I wished to say that although Mr. Bowden was stern and harsh towards me, yet it is but fair to add that I was generally in the wrong, and I think now—though I would not go back for all the world—that it was a foolish act of mine to run away from home."

"You ran away?"

"Yes—he," the colour deepening on my cheek, "struck me."

Miss Bowden looked thoughtfully at the fire, and then at me, with an expression of awakening interest in her full bright eyes.

"We will not dwell any longer upon the subject," said Miss Bowden; "it is a painful one to me—to both of us. Your relations are not aware that Mr. Bowden is my father, and I have not attempted to narrate a painful history. May I once more ask you not to mention my name in letters home?"

Before I could reply, the door opened, and Uncle Woodleigh, hand-in-hand with his daughter Mary, entered.

"How d'ye do, Robert? glad to see you," he said, with his customary volubility; "why haven't you called before, you knew where we lived? Miss Bowden, have you seen anything of the girls and Upton? It's very silly of them to begin all manner of long walks just as dinner is ready."

A knocking at the street door came in as accompaniment to this address.

"Oh! here they are. Dear me," rubbing the back of his ear in a nervous manner, "I wonder how long Dick means to lie in bed? We have got Dick home again for a little while, Robert," said he, his face brightening; "you will be glad to see him; he's grown a very fine fellow, and confound it," with

an irritable stamp of his foot, "he ought to know we dine at four o'clock on Sundays, by this time. Miss Bowden, will you be good enough to see—I beg pardon, will you be good enough to send some one up stairs to see whether he is up yet? I wouldn't wait dinner for Queen Victoria herself."

My Cousins Caroline, Constance, and Upton entered the room, and welcomed me to Grove House. They were really glad to see me, and I began to feel less embarrassed in the midst of my relations. There was another cousin made his appearance, however, and rushed at me to confound me. My Cousin Johnny, a red-faced, crop-haired little rascal, with not one atom of reserve in his whole disposition. His attack was rather startling—he flung himself at me with extraordinary impetuosity, jumping on my feet and trying to lift himself into my lap by the buttons of my best coat.

"Johnny, Sir, be quiet!" cried Mr. Woodleigh.

"He's *my* cousin, isn't he?—Upton told me he was coming—I want to sit on his knee!"

"You are too big to be nursed, Sir," remonstrated Caroline.

"No, I ain't," he bawled, "and you won't mind, will you? I want to ask all about you, and where you come from, and what my aunt's like."

I took him on my knee, with a sickly smile at the assembled company, and felt there was one cousin at least to whom I should never become attached; he was a spoilt boy, a horridly aggravating boy; I knew it the moment after he had introduced himself to my notice—when he was on my knee, trying to wrench a neat little gold stud out of my shirt-front, in which operation he was fortunately checked by the announcement of dinner.

There was just a little ceremony in passing into the dining-room, and for which Mr. Markingham had kindly prepared me. Mr. Woodleigh offered his arm to Miss Bowden, Caroline took her brother Upton's arm, and *that cousin* was left for me. And that cousin was looking very pretty, and should have been labelled "Dangerous," as Mr. Markingham had suggested. But I was on my guard. I was not going to fall in love with a silvery laugh, a pair of blue eyes, some ringlets, and two red pouting lips that called me cousin—NO!

We went into the dining-room, with Johnny hanging to the skirts of my coat, and retarding my progress; with Johnny laughing, and Constance laughing, too, though she

attempted to frown, as she bade him desist. In the dining-room I found Aunt Woodleigh waiting to receive me.

What a difference had ten years made in Mrs. James Woodleigh—what a difference, for the matter of that, will ten years make in us all! Honey-tongued friends may tell us that we are looking as well as ever, but we don't believe them, though we laugh and are flattered. Ten years make a great gulf between the past and the present, a deep well at the bottom of which lie all our good looks (as well as our past hopes and ambitions), and there is no fishing one of them back again!

Ten years ago, Mrs. Woodleigh, of Paddington, was a pretty woman of thirty-five years of age; now one would have thought her five and fifty at least. Her form was attenuated, her face was thin and deeply lined, and she was fast becoming an elderly lady. Ten years, too, had made some changes in a naturally good temper, as I dare say ten long years of indisposition would alter a great many people for the worse, as well as Mrs. Woodleigh. Mrs. Woodleigh had become peevish, at times a little childish—all her good spirits of thirty-five had long since evaporated; all that witty pleasantry which had first captivated James Woodleigh in his courting days had gone too. It is a hard effort to be merry with something the matter with the liver—try it, reader!

Nevertheless, Mrs. Woodleigh was, even in 1845, not entirely a fretful woman; there were her children to love and make much of, to brighten her home and her own heart; and Mrs. Woodleigh was a true mother, who found comfort in her children and made them the chief topic of conversation. Her children, like the old kings of England, could do no wrong; they were all brimming with virtues and wonderfully accomplished; there were no children in the whole wide world like them! Ah! if we were only as clever as our mothers think us, what a surprising world this would be, and how full of genius!

"Well, Master Robert," said Aunt Woodleigh, after a cursory glance at me through her eyeglass, "so you have come to London again. How do you do, my child?"

"Very well, thank you, aunt."

"I wish I could say the same, Robert," said she with a half sigh, as I shook hands with her, "but I must not think of being very well again, I suppose. Travel and change of air only make me worse—oh! dear me, it was only last summer that——"

"My dear," said Mr. Woodleigh, cutting short the recital of last year's indisposition, "dinner is on the table. Robert, take a seat, please. Johnny, you had better go up stairs, now."

Johnny, at this suggestion, rushed towards his mother, and burying his face in her lap, gave vent to a loud howl.

Mr. Woodleigh lost his temper.

"Somebody ring the bell, or kick that boy out! How provoking he is to-day."

"I want to have dinner—down here," sobbed Johnny. "I will have dinner down here—ow, wow!"

Mr. Woodleigh, very red in the face, was about to launch forth into anathemas on the head of Johnny, when he caught his wife's eye, and subsided into a mild cough.

"Let him have dinner with us, poor boy," pleaded Mrs. Woodleigh.

"But he has had dinner, my dear, with Mary and the nurse."

"Oh, dear!—let him have another, poor child!—he would not cry if he did not want something!"

So Johnny remained: a chair was placed for him by the side of me, and Johnny mounted thereon and looked round triumphantly. Johnny was a great care to me during the progress of dinner, and I had to keep a sharp look-out, lest he should drop something on my new black dress trousers and ruin them for ever. He was an observant boy, too, and watched every action of mine with an intentness that kept me red in the face all dinner time. Once or twice his father told him sharply to mind what he was about, but his mother immediately took his part and wondered how Mr. Woodleigh could snap the child like that for nothing. He was quite a wet blanket to all enjoyment. He troubled his father's mind seriously, and caused him to make wrong cuts in the haunch of mutton. It was a dinner without any style about it; there was no attempt at ceremony or display—the Woodleighs did not ape the manners of people in a higher sphere. The dinner was a good one, and comprised several courses; but there were no servants in livery to flit in the background, as I had dreaded, and Mr. Markingham had prepared me for. Two maid-servants waited on the family, and were prompt in their attendance, and they did not frighten me very much, though it was a long while before I got used to them. There was no formality, and there was a great

deal of talking ; everybody seemed anxious to set me at my ease. It was the table of a tradesman who was humble and gave himself no airs, though a table covered with fine linen and with every fork and spoon thereon impressed with the Hall mark.

Dinner was half over when the door opened, and Cousin Dick made his long-looked for appearance. Cousin Dick was not there every day, and was consequently somebody to be petted and made much of.

"Here's Dick at last !" cried Upton.

"Here's my big brother !" shouted Johnny, endeavouring, in the impulse of the moment, to scramble over the table and the haunch of mutton towards him. The sisters received him with smiles, and Mrs. Woodleigh for a moment looked thirty-five again. Paterfamilias was the only person who preserved his wonted aspect.

"It's very hard, Dick," he said, "you can't come down to dinner in time. I have not waited for you, Sir."

"Beg pardon, governor, but the fact is, I was terribly knocked up last night," said Dick ; "glad you have not waited—hate to keep anybody waiting. Ah ! Robert," with an easy nod towards me—"heard you were coming, hope you're well. And, mother, how are you this morning ?"

"About the same, Richard."

"I need not ask everybody else—everybody seems blooming. Don't move, Miss Bowden—thank you."

He took the vacant chair next Miss Bowden, and, leaning back therein, quietly waited to be attended to.

I sat and watched him, and thought he was a son of whom a mother might be proud.

He was a young man of two and twenty, tall, well-made, strikingly handsome, and on very good terms with himself—there was not a doubt on that last point. Still, although he was as fine a young fellow as one would meet in a day's walk, still there was something in his manner that I did not admire, and for which, at that time, I could not account. He hardly seemed a relation, and I could not fancy he was the Cousin Dick of ten years ago, the dark-haired, pale stripling whom his mother had been anxious about because he was growing so fast out of everything ! I did not like his eyes, though they were large, dark, and sleepy as a Circassian's, for there was a depth in them which gave no index to his character ; they were not those clear, fathom-

able, truth-telling eyes of which a few simple-hearted people in the world are the happy possessors. His small mouth, too, suggested the strange thought to me that it should have belonged to Miss Bowden ! whilst the sharply-cut lips of Miss Bowden, so expressive of decision and energy, would not have been out of place under the Grecian nose of Dick Woodleigh, and would have certainly stamped his face with a more masculine character. And yet there was not much of woman's nature, weakness, or indecision in him.

I observed a great deal that afternoon in a little time, and under difficult circumstances ; for when the dessert was on the table, there was Cousin Johnny on one side making havoc with some expensive strawberries ; and there was Cousin Constance on the other to chat with when I grew less embarrassed.

It was a pleasant day that I was spending ; I was heartily welcome there ; I was neither patronised nor made too much of, and, not being a very bashful boy, I soon recovered from the novelty of my position.

I thought a great deal of Mr. Markingham during the dessert — his warning never left me ; every time Constance smiled or spoke to me, "Take care of that cousin !" was ringing in my ears. I caught myself smiling once or twice at the absurdity of the late remarks of Mr. Markingham ; it was foolish to think that I should ever fall in love with a rich cousin, and much more ridiculous to dream of one so young and pretty as Constance being impressed by such a hobblededoy being as myself. Seventeen next month looks higher than growing youths who sit uncomfortably in their first surtouts—boys with no prospects, too ! Ha ! ha ! what a good joke, to be sure ! I was thinking of that cousin after the ladies and Johnny—thank Heaven, Johnny !—had left the dessert and the wine to the gentlemen, when Cousin Dick came to my side of the table with a cigar in his mouth, and took the seat which his sister Constance had vacated.

"Well, Bob Woodleigh, how long have you honoured the city of London with your presence ?"

"More than two years now, Richard."

"Upton tells me that you are in the counting-house of the Woodleigh establishment—dull work, isn't it ?"

"There is not much variety in the occupation, but I like it very well ; I have no right to dislike it."

"You don't go at it with my brother Upton's fervour. I wonder work don't kill him!"

"Don't you work hard in your line of business, Dick?" cried Upton, who had overheard the remark.

"Oh! yes, of course I do," replied Dick, with an odd twitch at the corner of his mouth.

Mr. Woodleigh, who was paring an apple, stopped, looked suspiciously at his son, and then said very gravely, perhaps a little satirically:—

"Not a doubt of it, I should say."

Dick said nothing in reply, and Uncle Woodleigh, after he had eaten his apple and taken another glass of wine, exchanged his chair for a couch near the fire-place and dropped into a refreshing slumber.

"How do you get on with my father, Bob?" asked Richard Woodleigh, in a low tone.

"Very well."

"It's precious strange that everybody can hit the right humour of the governor and get on 'very well' with him, except the eldest son," he muttered, staring hard at the decanters.

"Hollo, Dick!" exclaimed Upton, his eyes widening to a considerable extent. "What's the matter?—has anything gone wrong?"

"No, no," responded Dick, pulling another chair towards him and resting his legs thereon; "it's nothing particularly wrong, Uppy, my boy. It's the old complaint—the governor thinks I spend too much money, as if a gentleman can live at college on 'how-d'ye-do's' and good-mornings!"

"Certainly he can't," chimed in Upton, glancing at his sleeping parent; "and I dare say it is expensive living till you have won your degrees, and are legally qualified for the Church. I look forward to that day, Dick, upon my word."

"Oh! I shall give it up if I am to be always preached at when I want a few pounds," said Dick, keeping his eyes on his father's face, as though he were studying it. "I shall throw everything overboard and go for a soldier—I'm rather hasty, you know."

"Oh! father will talk differently to-morrow."

"No, he won't—besides, I have made up my mind. I'll run into debt, everybody else does at Oxford, and it all comes right in the end."

"How?" asked Upton, quietly.

"Oh! somehow. Taking bills, renewing them on an increased per-centage, putting your name to any piece of paper you are asked to sign—it is astonishing, my dear Upton, how the money rolls in upon that principle."

"And it *is* astonishing, my dear Dick, how soon the money stops rolling, and how the gentleman who has been signing every piece of paper keeps on rolling in his turn, for ever and ever, down, down, down."

Upton energetically rapped the table thrice with his wine-glass, and the third time broke the stem and spilt the wine over the table-cover. He blushed at his vehemence, and said testily:—

"That's all through you, Dick, talking nonsense, and putting me into a bad temper. You know the governor means well enough, and will do anything in reason."

"The governor is getting so horribly ill-tempered. Upton, there's no reasoning with him; it's a misery to talk to him."

"Pooh!" said his younger brother.

"It's a fact. Why, even mother spoke to him this morning about my affairs, and he stopped her up and made her almost ill."

"How much do you want?" asked Upton. "Sunday's not exactly the day to discuss money matters, but as something seems to be preying on your mind—out with it. It's no secret, I suppose?" with a glance at me.

"Shall I join the ladies?" said I, rising.

"No, no," cried Dick; "there's no occasion, George. Bob, or whatever your name is. I don't mind you; you don't know anybody of my set, that's certain."

"No," I answered, favouring Cousin Dick with a look that was far from amiable, as I resumed my seat.

"I only want seventy pounds till my allowance turns up again, Upton — that's the week after next. It's not much, is it?"

"Thirty-five pounds a-week for a single man is rather a lot of money to rattle through, *I think*."

"I'm not going to spend it on myself," said Dick; "there are some new books to pay for, and my tailor, and I owe a young chum of mine twenty pounds—he went home to his mother's funeral a month or two ago though, and has not returned yet."

"Is that Lord Baughton's son?"

"No; it's young Heberdeen, a fellow you don't know."

"Heberdeen!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, and," turning to his brother, "I am really trying to get out of debt as fast as I can, you see, Upton."

"I'll lend you the seventy, Dick."

"Thank you, Uppy—what a blessing it is to have a good-natured brother who is of a saving turn of mind."

"My savings are not large, Dick."

"They will be one day," replied his brother; "when it's Woodleigh and Son you will have the pull of me, or I am very much mistaken. Sometimes I wish that I had taken to trade, dusty ledgers, melancholy-mad looking counting-houses, and continual penance on a high stool, for it's a paying speculation, and what is the good of position if you have no money in your pockets to maintain it in style?"

Dick yawned, stretched himself, took up another cigar, looked at it, and put it down again. There was a long pause, and my Cousin Upton, who had suddenly turned thoughtful, made no effort to break the silence.

Dick, after yawn No. 2, abandoned his seat, walked to the looking-glass over the mantelpiece, and fell into an attitude before it. After an admiring stare at his handsome face, he arranged his necktie, ran his fingers through his hair, smiled at himself in an affectionate manner, and then, satisfied in mind, turned his back to the fire and whistled.

"I say, Upton," he said at last.

"What is it?" answered Upton, moodily.

"You don't repent trusting me?"

"Trusting *you*, Dick—no!"

"You look so precious thoughtful, that——"

"I wasn't thinking of the money," interrupted Upton; "I'd lend you seven hundred if I had got it."

"I wish you had, Uppy! Not that I'd borrow it," he added quickly; "but you are such an easy, good sort of a chap, that you deserve all the good the gods can bestow."

He returned to the table, filled his glass, and made a sign to me to imitate his example.

"I have much pleasure in proposing Upton Woodleigh's health. Long life to him, prosperity to the partnership *in futuro*—for he's a jolly good fellow!"

Richard Woodleigh and I drank his health, and Upton rose with an odd smile.

"Gentlemen, for the favour that you have done me—thank'ee.

Have the kindness to charge your glasses again, I have a friend's health to propose. Mr. Woodleigh, senior ! ”

We three drank it with due honour.

“ Dick,” his eyes sparkling, “ return thanks, you scamp. The governor is asleep, and you, as the heir of Grove House, are bound to respond. Now out with the truth and don't backbite your own father, as you have been nearly doing this afternoon. The truth, and shame the devil and Dick Woodleigh ! ”

Dick Woodleigh returned thanks, launched into encomiums on his father's virtues and abilities, and sat down with a “ Bravo, Dick,” from his brother, ringing in his ears.

After that came “ The Ladies,” proposed by Richard Woodleigh, and then Richard Woodleigh's health proposed by myself.

Unaccustomed to imbibe so freely, I began to hope that there was an end to toasts and sentiments, before there was an end to me under the table.

“ Talking of ladies,” remarked Dick, “ how Miss Bowden has improved—she's lost that hard sphinxy look since I last saw her. Do you remember how I used to tease her, Upton ? ”

Upton laughed.

“ What an amusement it was to see her fire up and talk of going away, once a-day, at least ! Is she as jealous as ever ? ”

“ Almost,” answered Upton.

“ I hear Miss Clewly's gone,” said Richard ; “ what is that for ? ”

“ I hardly know — she went yesterday — something about Mary ”

“ Miss Bowden's a nice girl ; if I were you, Upton——”

He stopped.

“ What ? ” asked Upton.

“ Nothing—shall we adjourn to the drawing-room ? ”

“ There is one more health to propose, I think, now we are in a toasting humour,” said Upton ; “ and etiquette won't let us overlook it. Now then.”

Glasses filled again, and Upton on his legs.

“ I propose the health of a friend of mine with some of the Woodleighs' hot blood in his veins—a friend of mine who is working for the Woodleigh cause. A friend,” with his characteristic twinkle of the eye, “ who requires only a *leelle*

more ballast to be all that is steady and business-like. Cousin Robert's health !”

Queer little party of wine-bibbers ! what a long while ago it seems since those healths were drunk in the dining-room, and Uncle Woodleigh was sleeping on the couch ! How opinions have changed since that time, and how differently we think of each other, now we have drifted each his own way, and the waters have risen and swamped one or two of us ! Which ?—Cousin Dick, Cousin Upton, or Cousin Bob Woodleigh ?



CHAPTER IV.

“TAKE CARE OF THAT COUSIN !”

EVERY family has its favourite, and Cousin Dick was the hope of the Woodleighs. Heaven knows what dreams of fame and distinction he had ; whether, behind that high white forehead, there were any of those ambitions and desires which spur a man onwards, and bring him off with the laurel-crown ; certain it is, that if he had no hopes of a name himself, most of the members of his family had them for him, and were looking forward to the brightest of futures. Mr. Woodleigh, senior, whose faith had been lately shaken by his son's carelessness in money matters, was probably the least sanguine ; and Mrs. Woodleigh, whose confidence in Richard was *not* to be shaken—for it was a mother's confidence, and everybody knows what that is !—was the most certain of his ultimate success.

Over an early tea that Sunday afternoon, Aunt Woodleigh told me of her hopes in Richard, and of the great man she expected he would prove himself some day, whilst Dick, the great man *in posse*, sat talking silly nothings to Miss Bowden.

“He is so clever, Robert,” Mrs. Woodleigh whispered, as though her announcement was a secret of immense importance. “I firmly believe there is nothing in the world he cannot do. He can write poetry, he has got an album full of his own compositions—and his letters are so earnest and elegant ! I am sure one he sent me,” dropping her voice still lower, “three weeks since, when I was in Belgium, was the most powerful

piece of writing I have seen for many a day—he wanted fifty pounds, dear lad ! ”

“ I suppose he is studying very hard for the Church ? ” I said.

“ Night and day, Robert ; don’t you think that he is getting thin ? ”

“ Oh ! no ; he is much stouter than when I saw him last. ”

“ I’m glad you think so, for sometimes I am quite uneasy about him. ”

Mrs. Woodleigh overlooked the fact that I had not seen Cousin Dick for a long period of years.

“ Yes, he is working hard, ” continued my aunt ; and though I beg of him to be careful for his health’s sake, he answers that nothing is done without perseverance, and so keeps on studying incessantly. My dear boy ! perhaps he will one day be a bishop, who knows ? ”

“ I dare say that there are plenty of bishops not half so clever, ” I remarked.

I was deceiving Aunt Woodleigh, but I was anxious to make progress in her good graces—she had the power of inviting me to dinner EVERY Sunday !

“ Not half so clever, my dear, ” she replied ; “ pushed in by favour—friends at court, and so on. But my Dick will get on purely by his extraordinary ability, and all he gets he will deserve, if it be even Lambeth Palace. ”

Before tea was concluded, some church-bells in the neighbourhood began to peal forth.

“ Who’s going to church to-night ? ” asked Upton, looking round the table. “ Dick, of course. ”

“ Eh ? ”

“ You’ll come with us, Dick ? ” asked Upton.

“ Who is going ? ” said Dick, languidly ; “ I should not like to leave mother all to herself. ”

Mrs. Woodleigh looked affectionately at him.

“ If Mrs. Woodleigh has no objection, ” said Miss Bowden, “ Mary, Johnny, and I will remain. ”

“ It’ll be a pity to keep Dick away from church *all* day, ” said my Cousin Caroline.

“ Oh, very well, ” returned Dick ; “ I am ready to go. What a noise you all make about it. ”

And Dick went out of the room to fetch his hat.

“ What do you say, Robert, about church ? ” asked Upton when Caroline and Constance had imitated Dick’s example of

retiring ; "do you feel inclined to join us ? You have not been to church to-day, I know."

"I have not been to church for many a day, Upton," I replied ; "my mother is a Methodist."

"Try church for a change, Robert."

"I should like it very much, if you are all going."

So I went to church with my cousins that Sunday evening, and preferred it to my past devotions in Nettleton Chapel, not that the minister was to be compared to Mr. Bowden, or woke up the consciences of his congregation half so forcibly. I walked to church, with Cousin Constance's hand upon my arm, Dick escorting his eldest sister, and Upton having to hold in Johnny, who had altered his mind at the last moment and insisted upon accompanying us. That was a pleasant walk to church through the lighted streets, with *that cousin* by my side ; I was a little nervous and embarrassed at first, being unaccustomed to ladies' society, but the frank artless manner of Constance Woodleigh carried all before it, and we were soon the best of friends. She had a great deal to say of her brother Richard, as he strutted on in advance of us—he was the grand hero with her too !

"He's so good-hearted, and generous," she said ; "sometimes I wish my brother Upton were more like him, although I love Upton just as well, of course. Which do you like best, cousin ?"

"Really, I don't know," I stammered ; "I have not seen much of Richard yet, and it is not fair to say I think Upton——"

"Proceed," said she, laughing, as I stopped.

"To say I think Upton more frank, more—upon my honour, Constance, I don't know how to explain myself !"

"But you like Upton best at present ?" she persisted.

"Yes, and I dare say I always shall. I am more with him—and there is not such an 'eyes on and hands off' sort of look about him—he's more plain, straightforward—I beg pardon, I don't mean straightforward, exactly."

"He is nearer your own age too, Robert."

"Yes."

"So I shall set him down for your favourite cousin ?"

"Yes, *at present*," I answered. I knew who would soon be my favourite cousin if I went very often to Grove House, and I knew also in my own heart that to go very often would be an unwise proceeding.

I forgot Mr. Markingham's warning when I was in the great family pew, in the middle aisle ; forgot my place in the prayer-book ; forgot Cousin Johnny, who was sitting with his feet in my hat ; even forgot that there was a gentleman in a surplice leaning over the cushioned pulpit and calling me a miserable sinner. For she was very pretty, and she had been amiable and free-spoken all that day—ah ! take care of that cousin !

Early times to think of taking care on the first day of our reunion, to feel my fluttering heart playing a variety of gambols inside my waistcoat, because we were looking over one hymn-book. Oh ! Bob Woodleigh, "the black sheep," don't begin to make a fool of yourself early in life—don't get sentimental on a small salary, or feel indignant with the young man twice as big as yourself in the next pew, who is leering at the sunny-faced cousin out of the corners of his eyes ! Time enough for the cap and bells when the world has rolled on half-a-dozen years, and there is a fair maid to fall in love with, and to have a chance of winning. The chance lies not in pew No. 57, middle aisle, where the ringlets are ; and first love, be it ever so fragile a flower, should take root in something !

The sermon over, the congregation dismissed, Dick, who had fallen into a graceful attitude with his eyes shut, reminded of his position, the Woodleighs going home that winter evening to Grove House. The brothers Woodleigh walked home together, Johnny trotting by the side of Dick, and continually dropping his prayer-book, whilst my lady-cousins were left to my especial care. Caroline and Constance talked of old times, of my mother, of my poor dead father, of the days when we were all children together, and then the conversation came round to Cousin Dick again, and I had to listen to more praises concerning him. Caroline Woodleigh was not so sanguine of the honours that awaited him at college, and in that great profession to which he had ostensibly devoted himself, as the mother—she was a shrewd girl, and had her doubts of Master Dick's "goings on."

"It is in his power to become a great man," said Caroline ; "but he has not his brother Upton's energy to support him, and he may give way before the difficulties, which are sure to rise in the path of every man who seeks to make his own fortune. Poor Dick ! he is resolute too in some things. I have been scolding him this afternoon."

"Scolding him, Carry!" exclaimed the wondering Constance; "scolding Richard!"

"I told him that he was getting too much of the fine gentleman for the Woodleighs, and that his grand acquaintances were spoiling him."

"And he defended himself—I know he did," cried Constance, looking eagerly round me at her sister.

"No, he turned sulky, and said it was neither my place nor my duty to school him. He asked if I wished to see him as grave and as old-fashioned as his brother Upton, and I said 'yes;' which offended him so much that he declined to walk home with me."

She laughed slightly, but it was not a merry laugh, and I fancied that she had been more pained by her brother's remarks than she cared to acknowledge. However, she changed the topic of conversation, and we reached home without any more allusions to Dick Woodleigh.

I stayed till a late hour at Grove House. I was in no hurry to go, and my relations were in no hurry to get rid of me. Mrs. Woodleigh bade me good-night at an early hour, and went up stairs leaning on the arm of him of whom she had such hopes. She had a good memory, and had not forgotten my flattering remarks concerning her eldest son; "she trusted to see me soon again at Grove House—she was sure that they would be all very glad to see me!" When the eldest son returned to the drawing-room, he took a seat by the side of Miss Bowden, and began flirting with her for the want of something better to do. I can hardly call it flirting, for Miss Bowden did not help him in the least, and tried all she could to make the conversation general. Possibly it was teasing. Dick had talked of his past habits of teasing my step-father's daughter; for I saw Miss Bowden's brow contract, and once those great eyes of hers actually "looked daggers."

She appeared to become speedily tired of the hopeful heir's society also, for, looking in that direction a second time, I found that she had changed her place, and was sitting by the side of Uncle Woodleigh.

Upton detected my wandering glance, and said:—

"Miss Bowden is quite one of the family, is she not?"

"Yes."

"She has been a long while with us, and is something more than Mary's governess or mother's companion now. What a temper she is in though—whew!"

"Temper ? "

"Yes ; don't speak so loud," said he ; "temper it is, and a jolly bad one. Dick has been upsetting her dignity, for a sovereign. Don't you hear how fast she is talking—something like the governor in combusive moments—that's a sure sign. I say, Dick," tilting back his chair towards his handsome brother—"what have you been up to, you rascal ? "

Dick, who was lounging gracefully on the couch and looking thoughtful, gave a little start of surprise on finding Upton's voice so close to his ear.

"Up to ?—nothing ! "

"You have been practising your old satirical tricks upon Miss Bowden ; she has an indignant fit on her, I know."

Dick laughed, and showed all his white teeth.

"By Jove, that girl is amusing ! It's as good as a play."

He did not say *what* was as good as a play ; he did not seem to care about continuing the conversation. Upton tilted back his chair, and Dick half shut his eyes, and smiled in an imbecile manner at the ceiling, like Adonis struck silly.

Nothing further passed that evening deserving of notice in these pages. I bade adieu to my kindred, and started homewards. That day's meeting had revived past associations. My relations had been certainly glad to see me, and had done their best to make me welcome. Cousin Dick was not particularly elated, but then he was some years older than I, and rather consequential. He gave me two fingers to shake when we parted, and I thought, "Confound his impudence ! " till Constance said, "You'll come soon and see us again, Robert," and then I forgot all about *him*.

I went home in a happy frame of mind, and found Mr. Markingham awaiting my arrival in the two-pair front, which looked extremely shabby that evening, with its worn carpet, its ancient Venetian blinds, and the centipede instrument called the Markingham grand.

Mr. Markingham was in his dressing-gown and slippers, and Mr. Markingham was smoking his favourite meerschaum.

"You are late home, Woodleigh," he remarked, as I stood on the threshold and looked into the room.

"I don't think that it has struck twelve yet, Sir."

"Is not 'the witching hour of night' late enough for you, profligate ? " observed my friend ; "and is not 'early to bed and early to rise' true philosophy ? "

"Perhaps it is."

"Well, I am anxious to know what sort of day you have spent, and you hang fire and are in no hurry to enlighten me."

"I have spent a very pleasant day, Mr. Markingham, thank you."

"The Woodleighs of Grove House gave you a hearty welcome!"

"Yes."

"And *that* cousin?"

"Oh," with a laugh and a flush, "that cousin was as glad to see me as any of them, and I have come away quite heart-whole, Sir; she's too high, too good, and too pretty for her father's clerk—of course she is."

"Of course she is," repeated Mr. Markingham. "Will you come in?"

"No, thank you, Sir," I replied. "I'll go straight to my room."

"There is nothing very inviting here," he said, acrimoniously. "The fire's out, the room's a shabby one, and there's only a prosy old fellow for company."

"I thought that you said early to bed was true philosophy," said I, entering; "but I'm in no hurry, Mr. Markingham, and if you think of sitting up for an hour or two, why, I will gladly keep you company."

"No, no; I am not going to sit up. Don't let your politeness keep you away from pleasant dreams."

"I have news for you," said I, suddenly recollecting a remark of Richard Woodleigh's."

"Good or bad?"

"Bad."

"Bad news upsets the system and disarranges the mental faculties. Keep your story till the morning."

"I thought that a philosopher was not to be disturbed by bad news."

"Neither is he," said Mr. Markingham, keenly regarding me; "and it must be very extraordinary news, indeed, the communication of which could disturb Stephen Markingham. Out with it!"

"I don't suppose that it will disturb you much, Sir," I said; "it's only news of some of the Nettleton folks—you are acquainted with them, I believe?"

"No."

"The very first day of our meeting, I think you mentioned the name of Heberdeen."

life mild in ; glad I'm out of it. No chance of a fellow getting on amongst the ruralities, was there ? ”

“ Have you adopted any profession, Tom ? ”

“ Sawing.”

“ Sawing ? ”

“ Sawing and mangling, cutting and wounding, dissection in the highest perfection. I'm a student at Guy's, and am doing the walking business of that respectable hospital. At the end of three years, I shall go up for examination, pass, of course, and set up in style with the money my grandmother was good enough to leave me. I suppose you heard of her hooking—of her death, poor old soul ? ” he corrected.

“ Yes, I heard the news from my mother.”

“ Three thousand, seven hundred, and ninety-three pounds odd, Bob,” said Tom. “ A chap ought to make a tidy start in life with that.”

“ If he takes care.”

“ I'm the most careful fellow of my age. I always was of the steady order, if you remember.”

“ I can't remember.”

“ Dry as ever, Bob,” said Tom, with a laugh—“ you can't get over your old habits. But,” looking grave—“ I really mean to be extremely careful—upon my soul, I do ! I have not spent any of it yet—that is, hardly any.”

“ Spent any—why, you're not one and twenty yet ! ”

“ No, but,”—with an expressive wink—“ we knowing young chaps can easily work that sort of thing. There are lots of Shadrachs and Abednegos to advance a little money for a *conshideration*,” imitating the peculiar accent of the Hebrews with admirable effect.

“ I hope that you've not been up to any of that fun, Tom.”

“ Just a little—nothing to speak of,” replied Tom, carelessly. “ You see the old man down at Nettleton draws the reins too tight at times, and makes it awkward. One must keep moving.”

“ Yes ; but be careful.”

Tom indulged in a hearty laugh, swung his legs about in a frantic manner, threw up the ruler and caught it again, and fairly crowed with delight.

“ Ho ! ho ! Bob Woodleigh telling me to be careful ! Prudent, steady, amiable Bob, who never spent a waste penny in his life, and is as chock-full of morals as a doll with sawdust.

Oh ! dear," wiping his eyes, " this is one of the best jokes that I have heard of for some time. Bob Woodleigh, too !—who ran away from home after plundering the Nettleton Bank, setting fire to the Methodist chapel, and knocking his step-father's head off."

" Not so bad as that, Tom."

" Knocking his teeth out, then—incisors or molars ? "

" I don't know."

" The whole lot, perhaps—single and double-breasted. Oh ! Bob," with another scream of laughter, " you should have heard him preach the next Sunday after the damage ; I went myself on purpose. It was the richest joke ; first he had plums in his mouth, and then he had something that hissed, and then he stuttered—oh, my sides ! "

I had not listened with any pleasure to Tom Arrow's criticism on my step-father's discourse, for time had crushed out all vindictive feeling, and I knew what a good husband he was to my mother ; but it was beyond my power to see Tom Arrow roll off the stool and nearly laugh himself to death, and not catch the contagion and laugh too.

We were in the midst of our conviviality when the counting-house door opened, and Upton Woodleigh reappeared.

" Don't let me disturb you, gentlemen," said he, as he resumed his place at the desk ; " sorry I can't offer you a seat Mr.—Mr.—I forget your name—but you see we are pressed for room here and spare of furniture. Pressed for time here sometimes—ahem ! "

" Yes, I suppose so," said Tom ; " time is always valuable, is it not ? "

" Very."

" I never wasted a minute in my life," said Tom, with the most solemn expression of countenance ; " I'm like that *Grecian* emperor who was so particular about his time that he used to fret himself silly if he lost a day. Let me see, what was that cove's name ? "

" It is of no consequence."

" Oh ! yes, it is though, Mr. Woodleigh," said Tom gravely ; " we ought not to forget our histories of England like that, we are not brought up with a classical and mathematical education, use of the globes, astronomy and dancing, to forget it all again. It is not our duty to our neighbour."

Upton screwed his mouth into a small compass, and tried to look business-like and frown down my rackety friend ; but it

was no use, he burst into one of his own merry little laughs and said :

"Upon my word, Mr. Arrow, you have an extraordinary flow of spirits."

"Always had, Sir ; so had my grandmother ; hadn't she, Bob ? "

"Well, I never remarked it."

"Bad-tempered people used to call it a flow of evil spirits, but that was quite a mistake. I say, Mr. Woodleigh? "

"Sir," responded Upton.

"How do you find business? "

"Nothing to complain of," Upton replied to his familiar interrogator ; "a little dull, perhaps."

"Well, as business is a little dull, Sir, perhaps you will have no objection to spare my friend for a day? " he said quickly. "We haven't met for goodness knows how many years, and we have such a precious lot to talk about. Bob and I, Sir, were the Siamese twins of Nettleton—the bounding brothers."

Upton looked at me with an inquiring elevation of his eyebrows.

"The books are rather heavy to-day," I said ; "there's a great deal of posting, and if it will be any inconvenience——"

"Not at all," said Upton, quickly ; "it can be managed well enough, and I think we owe you a day for that 28th of February—your late night here."

"But my uncle? "

"Oh ! I'll make it all right with him, Robert ; there is nothing much to do to-day ; don't be late to-morrow morning—we——" looking at Tom, "shall be *very* busy to-morrow."

"All right, Sir," said Arrow. "I understand plain speaking. Now, Bob, how long are you going to be? "

Tom Arrow and I had wished Upton good-day and were already in the yard, when my cousin called me back. I returned alone into the counting-house.

"Take care of yourself, Robert," said he, in a low voice—"your friend from Nettleton," pointing in the direction of the door with the feather of his pen, "appears perhaps a trifle too volatile."

"It's only his way, Mr. Upton," I replied ; "there is not a better tempered, warmer-hearted little fellow in the world."

"I can see as much as that, I think," said Upton ; "still these easy fellows are not the best companions for those who have to work their way upwards. But it is not my place to

read you a homily, Robert ; I merely give you a friendly hint."

"There's nothing to fear in Tom."

"Only the danger of imitating him, and I shouldn't like to see Robert Woodleigh quite such a harlequin."

My natural heat of temper made me retort.

"Thank you for advice gratis, cousin."

"What, Robert—riding the high horse !"

"No, no ; only you would not like me to advise you about *your* friends—tell you not to imitate your brother Dick, for instance."

Upton's face flushed, and he held up his right hand quickly, saying :—

"That'll do, Robert ; a friend is one thing, a brother is another. Perhaps I have gone beyond my province in offering you advice ; it shan't occur again. Good-morning."

I felt that I had been too hasty ; felt sorry that I had uttered a word to wound the feelings of him who wished me well, who that very morning was about to do double work to oblige *me*. I knew not what to say to soften the difference that had sprung up, and so walked slowly out of the counting-house and joined Tom Arrow in the yard.

I thought Tom Arrow might really be a trifle too volatile when I found him cutting his name on the gate of the warehouse adjoining, — "just to while away the time," as he expressed it.

"Don't do that, Tom !" I cried ; "what's that for ?"

"It's all right, old boy," he said coolly ; "I always like people to know that I have called ; it's merely another way of leaving your card. Well, if you won't wait for the surname, I'll wind up with a symbol."

And suiting the action to the word, he scored an immense broad arrow after the "Tom" which he had inscribed, and made the premises Crown property.

"Nice chap, that cousin of your's, Bob," said Tom, as we walked across the yard ; "rather too stiff, perhaps. Wants to see a little life."

"He prefers being grave in business hours."

"Ah ! it's a bad habit. There's nothing like humour in business. When I was at school, I could always do my compound addition best by singing a comic song over it ; and in my new profession, if I don't whistle in the dissection-room, I can't get on at all. Depend upon it, Bob, your cousin is too

sober and matter-of-fact for his age; and, if he don't take care, it will bring him to an early grave."

So, Tom Arrow's criticism made up for Upton Woodleigh's—which was right? We sum up our friends and our neighbours with great shrewdness and critical acumen; and those good people, knowing nothing of our summary, sit quietly at home and abuse us in their turn.



CHAPTER VII.

TOM ARROW TAKES ME INTO HIS CONFIDENCE.

WHAT a pity it is that our pleasant days seldom turn out of any profit to us—that pleasure and profit are as wide asunder as the poles. All those weary, head-splitting days, when we slaved at our ledgers and half killed ourselves with figures; those nights, with the sad heart, the blotted MS., and the midnight oil—rememberest thou them, oh Authorling?—may put money in the purse; but those delightful excursions, those happy pic-nics, the fun at the races, where we took too much champagne and were carried home helpless, what a deal of the "needful" they extract from our pockets!

That day I spent with Tom Arrow was a pleasant one, albeit it was an idle, profitless, good-for-nothing day, only fit for two scapegraces with fine souls for laziness.

We spent the day at Greenwich, at the "Ship," with white-bait and plenty of wine; we sat by the window and smoked our cigars—yes, *we* smoked our cigars, and how soon, for my own part, I regretted the experiment. We talked of past times, of the days at Nettleton, of the fun we had had together at school, of the mischief we had perpetrated, and the bad names, in consequence, we had earned from the town's folk, till our hearts were running over with good fellowship.

And where is the man, I wonder, who can meet his old friends—the friends with whom he went to school and in whose sports he took a share—and not forget over the wine all the years that have intervened and all the struggles in the greater school where the hard lessons are taught?

It is not that hard man on the Stock Exchange with the

steel-snap of a mouth ; nor the wide-awake gentleman with the white hat and note-book ; nor the foxy individual with the sharp eyes and the long quill pen, who is running in and out the Bank of England fifty times a day ; nor any of the money-spinners of Lombard and Threadneedle Streets. Set such people together, when the day's toil is over, with their old friends and schoolfellows, and see what a deal of humanity oozes out from the depths, and hear of what impudence and daring those cautious people indulged in before they were out on the world making seventy per cent.

"Tom," I remarked, as we sat at the window, surveying the life on the waters, "you have not told me anything of the Heberdeens, or whether Nettleton still agrees with them. Young Heberdeen goes to college with my Cousin Dick."

"A pretty fellow for college," said Tom, filling his glass with a hand that shook a little ; "about as headstrong and passionate as human nature can be ; not an atom of steadiness in him !" added Tom, looking as grave as a judge.

"Is he studying for the Church ?"

"I don't know, Bob, and upon my word I don't care. If he's going to be a minister, it's my opinion, when he gets out of temper in the pulpit, he'll swear at the congregation. Fill your glass."

"Don't be in a hurry."

"Then pass that decanter—I'm thirsty."

"Steady, Tom."

"I'm as steady as a tax-gatherer," said Tom, with a slight hiccup ; "I always know when to stop, Bob ; I'm one of those individuals who can halt at the line of discretion, and say, 'not a step further for love or money.'"

"When did Mrs. Heberdeen die, Tom ?"

"Some months ago, I believe," answered Tom ; "I was in London then—don't let us talk any more about stuck-up people, there's a good chap."

Tom had emptied his glass, and was regarding the decanter wistfully.

"Do you remember the fifth of November, and the fall off the Squire's wall into the orchard ?" I asked.

"Ah ! what a lark—and the dog that wanted to bite you, and the stone, and the Squire's visitors staring at us, and—ho, ho, ho !—your torn corduroys, wasn't it a rent in them ?"

"Yes, and Miss Heberdeen recommending me to mercy—by the way, how is she getting on ?"

"I don't know—decanter, please; *why* don't you fill your glass?"

"Presently, Tom, presently."

"You were not slow in following a good example at Nettleton—remember the fair?"

"Yes, and to return to the Heberdeens again, I wonder if the young Squire really thought that I had picked up that sovereign of his?"

"Bother the Heberdeens!—how you keep dragging that name into the conversation! Do you think I care for any of the Heberdeens, man, woman, or child? Not a bit of it. I hate the lot of them, I wish they were all—no, I don't, never mind!"

"Why, Tom, what's the matter?"

"Bob, my boy," lighting another cigar, "I'll tell you. You and I are brothers in arms.

'We have grown up together like young apple trees,
And we've clung to each other like double sweet peas,'

says William Shakspeare. We're not to be parted—hic—are we?"

"Certainly not."

"Then fill your glass and pass the decanter—what the devil do you keep the wine all to yourself for?"

"All right."

"It's all wrong, I think; but however, Bob, you are the fellow after my own heart, and the fellow I will always stick to—like a—like a—what's that thing that sticks to everything?"

"Barnacle?" I suggested.

"Damn it, why couldn't I think of 'Barnacle!' Do you know, Bob, it's my firm conviction that my mind is impaired—has been getting weak ever since that affair."

"What affair?"

Arrow drew his chair close to mine, and began his confession. There was a difficulty in understanding it at first, as Tom was rambling, had a thick utterance, and spoke with the cigar in his mouth.

"After you left Nettleton, she grew up an angel, Bob."

"She, who?"

"Harriet, you fool—don't interrupt!"

"Go on," said I, still in the clouds. "I am all attention."

"She grew, Sir, something more than heavenly, and when her mother was so very ill, many and many a time, Bob, has she come into the shop with the physician's prescription—devilish bad hands these physicians write; my father could never make 'em out under an hour and a-half, and as I was only my father's apprentice, I did not like to prepare them on my own responsibility, for it wasn't law, and *she* wouldn't have liked it, but she grew, Bob, a beauty. Wine, please, and if you don't fill your glass, I'm blessed if I'll tell you another word."

"There, then."

"This is private and confidential, every word of it, Robert Woodleigh. I swear you to secrecy, and if you betray me, you'll sunder us for ever. It was a strange affair, wasn't it?"

"I have not heard the end of it."

"I suppose you can guess?" said Tom, with a maudlin sigh.

"Did you fall in love with Harriet?"

"Bob Woodleigh, we are friends now—let us keep so!"

"Certainly."

"Then don't you call her Harriet; it's a liberty I never took myself, and I do not expect any friend of mine to take it. It's out of place and uncalled-for. Oh! Bob," flinging his cigar down passionately, "I was fool enough to think of her and love her—I, a bit of a boy, an infernal young jackass, who was not fit to be her servant, or run on her errands. There was not a chance; I knew that well enough, although my grandmother had money, and I was down for the whole lump of it."

"Well?"

"Well, I hung about her home; I went to Nettleton Church every Sunday that I might see her; I turned doctor's boy, and took the medicine in my pocket to the house, and although she never answered the door, there was a consolation in knowing that I was near her. I worried myself to death about her, and then, when I could not bear it any longer, I came to London, a ru-ru-ruined, br-br-broken-hearted man, as thin as a hurdle! What are you laughing at?"

"London has fattened you again, Tom," with a glance at his substantial figure.

"Yes, I'm picking up flesh now," said Tom; "it was not likely that I was going to fret myself to death about her. She was too high for me—I don't mean too tall, although she is

about a head and shoulders—and there is not a finer girl in all England, I'll bet fifty to one."

"If you really did think anything of the girl, you are better in London, Tom."

"I know it," replied Arrow. "I knew London was the place to drown dull care, and medicine the profession—*not the liquor, mind*—in which to drown it. So I paid, or my father paid, a hundred pounds for a life membership at Guy's Hospital, which place I am what is termed walking. And a nice walk it is, take it altogether; although at first I would have changed it for a milk-walk in a respectable thoroughfare, and been glad."

"Are you making any progress in your profession?"

"Getting on, Bob, getting on," was the reply; "she interfered with my studies for a week or two, but I soon settled that. I was not going melancholy mad for Miss Heberdeen."

"Oh! it was Miss Heberdeen."

"Of course it was; I have said so fifty times. What do you mean?"

"Nothing, Tom. Don't get excited."

"Therefore, Bob, take my advice and don't look above your station, or make a fool of yourself by falling in love with a gentleman's daughter. We are not gentlemen, you know."

"No."

"We don't look like it—nobody takes us for gentlemen; even the waiter would not believe it if we were to take our Bible oath of it. There is not a bit of the gentleman about us."

"Speak for yourself, Tom."

"We may have lots of money, but still there is a something wanting. What have you done with the decanter?"

"Here it is."

"Empty, by Jove! how you have been drinking the wine. Let us ring for another——"

"No, I'll have no more," said I, rising, and walking in a steady manner, in an uncommonly steady manner, towards my hat in the distance, "it's time to be thinking of London."

"We'll go to the play and wind up the evening, Bob. There's nothing like life for the constitution."

The bell was rung, and the bill was settled by Tom Arrow, who indignantly knocked away the purse which I had drawn from my pocket.

"This is my invitation," he said; "when we go out again,

we'll talk about the score. Come on—there's a clock striking six."

We left the "Ship" and went to London, and concluded the evening at the theatre. We spent a pleasant evening there, although in our opinion the pieces were not performed in a creditable manner, and the plot of each was strangely confused.

Tom saw me to my door in Barker Street—that he might know where to call when he wanted me—but declined entering that particular evening.

"No, thank you, Bob," he replied to my solicitation; "I've work to do at home—it won't do to neglect the profession."

"You will not begin work to-night?"

"Yes, I shall," said Tom. "I shall get out all my books with the nasty pictures, my little collection of bones, and my stethoscope; that'll look like business, and if I can only keep awake—I can't for the soul of me think what makes my eyes feel so heavy to-night!—I'll work in first-rate style. Good-night, Bob—I'll give you a call in a night or two."

Tom and I parted, and as he went rather unsteadily down the street, whistling a lively melody, he did not appear much of a victim to the tender passion, or one who had lost any great portion of his heart to Miss Heberdeen, of Nettleton.



CHAPTER VIII.

PHILOSOPHY AND BUSINESS.

"COME in," responded the deep voice of Mr. Markingham to my summons at his drawing-room door.

"I thought that I would see if you were still up, Mr. Markingham," said I, entering.

"Thanks for your kind consideration."

I knew Mr. Markingham was in an unamiable mood by his reply; when the "*Suaviter in modo*" was predominant, there was always fair reason to suspect that something had happened to cross him. I was somewhat surprised to find Mr. Markingham at a table covered with letters, papers, and parchment deeds.

"I did not know that you were busy, Sir."

"It's a new thing to see me busy, is it not?" said he; "to see philosophy tiring itself to death over these dregs from the bitter cup of the law. What good is to be evolved from them? And if it could be all changed like a dream—what then?"

He stared over my shoulder at something behind me—the third-rate prints on the wall, the pattern of the paper perhaps, but it made me feel as uncomfortable as if something from another world had been the object of his gaze.

"I shall look in to-morrow before I go to business, Sir."

"I shall have nothing to tell you—have you any news for me?"

"No, Sir."

"Then I may not be up early enough for you—to-morrow; I must have a long rest after my—my work! May I ask where you have been to-night?"

"Out with a friend."

"You are not at home of an evening quite so often, Woodleigh; do you find the nights tedious here—with philosophy?"

"Oh! no, Sir," said I; "but I cannot help visiting my uncle's occasionally."

"And where have you been to-night with this friend, Woodleigh?" he repeated, his keen eyes fixed on me; "to your uncle's?"

"No, to the 'Ship' at Greenwich."

"You!"

"Yes, and afterwards to the play."

"Still with this new friend of yours?"

"This old friend of mine—a schoolfellow."

"Ah! one of your own age, all life and high spirits, a better companion for you than a sour-tempered, middle-aged fellow like me."

"My dear Mr. Markingham, I hope you do not think——"

"I think of nothing," he interrupted; "there is no occasion. I don't want you for a friend; you know by this time that I am a man without one. I hate the name of friend; it is a name but coined at the lip, often misused, and seldom uttered truly—it has a base ring in the ears of a philosopher."

"I hope that you will consider me a friend—you have been a friend to me."

"If I were to ask for a proof of your friendship you would turn away, Woodleigh."

"No, Sir."

"Words, words," he muttered; "why should I believe in them? Woodleigh, you would not give up that *friend* of to-night for me."

"Can I not have two friends?"

"You surely don't believe in the friendship of that gentleman in whose delightful company you have spent the present evening?"

"I believe that he would do anything to serve me."

"Try him and see," replied Markingham; "you are not one and twenty, and have all the sanguine feelings of the boy --I can but say with Mary Wortley Montague:—

‘Oh youth! oh spring of life! for ever lost!’

Montague, said I—did she not steal that line from Gay, the jade?"

"I don't remember."

"Who said you did?" he answered sharply.

As he bundled his papers and deeds into one mass, he added—

"I'll disturb my philosophy no more to-night by chasing shadows—why should I? Good-night, Woodleigh, *friend* Woodleigh, shall I say?"

"Yes—friend Woodleigh."

"Ah! you are enthusiastic to-night—there is warm blood at your heart, and your brain is unsteady. That was good wine at the ‘Ship?’"

"Very."

"I thought so," he said drily, as I bade him good-night and retired to my room.

By the next evening Mr. Markingham's bad tempers had dispersed, and he was as cool, self-possessed, and indolent as ever; he busied not himself with law-papers, and deeds; he played chess with me, and won every game, as a matter of course. Still his philosophy was less stable than heretofore—he was more easily excited, was occasionally, I thought, depressed. Two or three times after the evening just mentioned, I found him again poring over his papers and deep in calculation, and once I discovered him in earnest conversation with a little gentleman in black at the door of his own room. Suddenly, too, he began to economise, to leave off all those country ex-

cursions in which he had previously delighted, and finally to become absent and thoughtful as the days lengthened and the spring began to grow old.

Once, upon my remarking that I thought he was changed he said with that short, hard laugh that conveyed no hilarious meaning :

"Change is the great law of Nature—we are all changing ; scientific men will tell you that the men of to-day are not the men of yesterday, and philosophy proves the same thing in a different manner. I *have* changed, Woodleigh, in thought and resolve ; adopted even another kind of—philosophy ! I used to think too much of the present ; now I am building on—looking at," he corrected, "the future !"

"It don't seem to make you happier, Sir ?"

"The result must prove that, Woodleigh. I am merely putting my happiness out at interest, and time will, perhaps, bring it all back again—it is worth the chance."

"Are you coming into a fortune, Sir ?"

Another hard laugh, as he replied :—

"What a host of those friends I warned you of the other night should I have, if I were ! Fortune and Stephen Markingham don't seem to agree very well together, Woodleigh, and it would not do to dream too much of riches at my time of life. You are curious ?"

"I did not know that it was a secret."

"A little one for the present. When the play is over, I will let you know what the plot was about. I believe I am philosopher enough to bear the good it may bring calmly, and if there be evil from it 'all the ills that flesh is heir to,' why, they can be borne too with a Spartan-like fortitude."

Stephen Markingham discussed the subject no farther, and in all our subsequent interviews he studiously avoided it. Time in due course solved the riddle, but it was not till time had brought changes to me as well as to Markingham.

Before the summer came, I had introduced Tom Arrow to Mr. Markingham, and the latter gentleman had not been particularly struck at first sight with the merits of my old companion ; however, Mr. Markingham was not a man to bear a dislike, and the extraordinary spirits of Tom Arrow, his self-possession, his evident enjoyment of life, soon softened the feelings of philosophy towards him.

"He's not a man—or rather a boy—to take kindly to," said Mr. Markingham one evening, when I asked for his opinion

of Tom Arrow. "There's nothing earnest in him—he's about as weak-minded as anybody can be, short of an idiot. It is doubtful whether society would not stamp him an idiot at once, if it were not for his coolness and impudence."

"That is a sharp criticism, Mr. Markingham."

"A lengthy one, perhaps—it might have been summed up in three words."

"What are they?"

"Good tempered fool!"

"Upon my honour, Mr. Markingham, you have no regard for the feelings of a friend."

"*Friend* again!" sneered Mr. Markingham; "how constantly you harp on that word; and I have told you that I hate it!"

Mr. Markingham left me in high dudgeon, and I started to Tom Arrow's lodgings in Brunswick Street, Southwark.

Tom Arrow and I were inseparables once more—it was the old time at Nettleton over again, and the majority of our spare evenings were spent together. I became acquainted with some fellow students of Tom's, and rare evenings we had in his apartments, and rare fun when we went out six abreast, with cigars in our mouths—out for a lark!

No, Tom Arrow did me no good; I often thought of Upton Woodleigh's warning, when I was opening the door of No. 2, Barker Street, at three in the morning. He kept late hours, and I imitated him; he made me late for business of a morning, much to my cousin's secret annoyance, and to keep up with him at all, I had to spend all my money—that money which I now received in quarterly portions of twenty-one pounds, ten shillings, and for which I always tendered a receipt very full of flourishes.

Yet, Tom Arrow, with all his late hours and his loose habits, was the best hearted little fellow in the world; there was not a grain of viciousness in his whole disposition. He was not a reckless man, he was simply a heedless boy. He plunged into none of the evil courses which lie open to the prodigal in the great city—great in its temptations, as in its wealth and power. He had a weak head, and it led him to drink too much wine at times and grow quarrelsome, took him into scrapes, from which he found a difficulty to extricate himself, but it never filled his heart with evil, I testify it here, old friend!

Still, Upton Woodleigh was right enough: he was not the best companion for me; he did not improve my business habits,

and he might have done me a great deal more harm if there had not been my first love—my hopeless love—to counteract the effect.

For an invitation to Grove House was a greater charm than any Tom Arrow had to offer, and what is an old friend to a sunny-faced cousin ! I went nearly every Sunday to Paddington again. I fluttered round the flame still, moth-like, and filled my heart with love, and yet I played the hypocrite so well that no one read my secret.

Sometimes I was inclined to ask myself, " Did Constance read it ? " I thought she did ; that if she knew it not for a certainty, there was still a look within my eyes, a something different in my tone, that kept her watchful. This, I fancy, made her at times cold and distant to me ; at other times most kind and gentle, so strangely kind and gentle, that it seemed as if it were done for pity's sake, and never—oh ! never that—as if to give me hope to work and wait for her.

I was not weak enough to become again a visionary, and when temptation did suggest itself, I sought refuge in Tom Arrow's society, and forgot her for the time. It was a wild, unsettled life ; it kept my brain working uneasily. It is egotism to say that I was a youth of deep feeling, and that I only wanted the right counsel, the real friend—was it even Mr. Markingham ?—to work upon that feeling with a master hand, and make a man of me for life ? But the master hand was lacking, and the instrument fell out of tune !

Meanwhile the Woodleigh business increased ; fresh vans and horses were added weekly ; Uncle Woodleigh and Cousin Upton were always hard at work ; another clerk was taken into the counting-house, my senior in years, my junior in office.

The new clerk was shrewd and clever, and I had to work with greater energy and turn with renewed ardour to cash-book and ledger in order to keep up with him. But the work grew more weary every day, and I was glad when my fortnight's leave of absence, my holiday time, came round.

I had nearly made up my mind to start for Nettleton, and take my mother and Mr. Bowden by surprise there, when Tom Arrow proposed sundry little projects which upset my schemes for that year. First, we and some meds went on a two days' rowing excursion, and returned in a blistered condition ; secondly, we had a day's fishing, then we went to a prize-fight, and then we rode down to Ascot races, and saw Emperor win the cup. That got rid of one week comfortably and quietly. The second week was full of toil and trouble.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEGINNING OF A MEMORABLE DAY.

EARLY in the second week Tom Arrow and I went down to Richmond. Mr. Markingham had on the previous Sunday proposed to accompany us, but when I reminded him of his promise on the Tuesday, he drew a few silver coins from his pocket, and carefully counted them over.

"No, Woodleigh, it will not do," said he, restoring the money to his pocket with something very like a sigh. "I must keep quiet this summer, or there will ensue a winter of my discontent. Philosophy three months ago would have said, 'Enjoy the present ;' now it warns me of the to-morrow—that to-morrow," with his short laugh, "that never comes !"

No persuasion of mine could induce Mr. Markingham to alter his determination ; therefore, Tom Arrow and I set forth to Richmond alone.

Pleasant old Shene ! what has happened to it that kings and queens turn their backs to its groves, and that poets no more think of praising its charms than of lauding Melissa the faded,—the belle of the season five years ago ? People don't seek Richmond for change of air now ; the train that rattles through its fair landscape bears the pleasure-seekers away, and were there a second plague,—and the Silent Highway has all the ingredients,—should we remove our courts of justice to its vicinity again ? No, no, we have done with it ; a few of the upper ten thousand may dine at the "Star and Garter," and make merry, but the age of progression has left Richmond behind—left it for those hard-working, honest, plain-speaking cits at whom "society" turns up its nose and cries, "COCKNEY !"

Still Richmond Park flourishes, though it is not quite exclusive enough for May Fair and Park Lane, and the sovereign people can enjoy themselves within its precincts better than in the days long ago, when the sovereign Charles I., of sacred memory, wanted it all to himself, like a selfish king as he was.

It was close on three in the afternoon when Tom Arrow and I were indulging in the *dolce far niente* under the shade of a huge elm—Tom on his back, with a felt "wide-awake" over one eye, and I in a more romantic attitude, full length on the grass,

with one arm gracefully supporting my head, as became a despairing lover of eighteen.

"Are you asleep, Bob?" asked Tom Arrow, breaking in upon a ten minutes' reverie.

"Asleep! no.—*Are you?*"

"I'm in that progressive state termed by the gentlemen of Guy's 'getting peckish,'" observed Tom; "I vote for the town, dinner for two, pale ale for four, and those three-cornered maids-of-honour puffs for fifty—OH!"

Tom scrambled hastily to his feet, seized his walking-cane, and began a vigorous dance round a small terrier, which had suddenly announced its appearance by a wild yelling in our ears.

"Mad dog, by jingo!" cried Tom, making desperate cuts at the animal as it dashed round us and snapped in a lively manner at our legs, "we are both in for hydro—*come out*—phobia, and—lie down, you devil!—if you don't mind, we shall return to London arm-in-arm and barking like one o'clock—mind your legs—hoo!—hoo!"

We had not recovered from the surprise of this canine charge, and Tom, I, and the terrier were still executing a *pas de trois* of a complicated description, when a loud and continuous whistle arrested the dog's attention and our own. The dog, with its four legs very wide apart, fell into position, pricked up its ears, paused, trotted two or three yards to the right, paused again, altered its mind, and, with every hair bristling with indignation, darted at us with renewed vigour, made a feint of flying at me, and then slipping artfully under Tom's guard, hung on tenaciously to the leg of his trousers.

I had just succeeded in kicking the dog off, and we were beginning to set to partners again, when two new-comers appeared upon the scene, one a dark stripling of nineteen, the other my Cousin Upton. The former lost no time in catching the animal by the back of the neck and flinging it to a considerable distance, anathematising it at the same time in the heartiest manner, whilst the latter looked at me for a moment with intense surprise, and then extended his hand towards me.

"What, Robert!" he cried, "and Mr Arrow too—how do you do, Sir? This is what the newspapers call a singular coincidence. Mr. Heberdeen,—my cousin, Mr. Woodleigh. Mr. Arrow—Mr. Heberdeen; a particular friend of my brother Dick's," he added, in a lower tone to me. Tom and I coloured, although for very different reasons, as we raised our hats to the young Squire, who rather haughtily returned our salute. We

knew him instantly, and the recognition was mutual. I have often thought it strange that my boyish antipathies should have revived so suddenly at the sight of him, for scarcely an instant had passed before I was regarding him with the same feelings of envy and dislike that I had experienced at Nettleton.

Tom Arrow, who, with gentlemen of any degree, was the most unabashed individual it has ever been my fortune to meet, settled his "wide-awake" on one side of his head and looked first at Mr. Heberdeen and then at a jagged piece of trouser—shepherd's plaid pattern—which was dangling over his boot.

"Might have been a bit of my leg, Mr. Heberdeen," said Tom, "and then I'm inclined to think the law would have held you responsible for assault and battery—bitery, I should say. Ha! ha! it is rather funny I did not recognise the dog though, and if he had only looked dispassionately at me a moment, I have no doubt that he would have given an amicable wag to his tail, instead of increasing my tailor's expenses."

Mr. Heberdeen smiled in a faint manner—a supercilious manner, I thought—but said nothing in reply.

"And what brings you to Richmond, Robert?"

"Idleness, Upton," I replied; "when one has a fortnight's holiday there is some difficulty in spending it."

"Ah! you are anxious for business again, Robert; that's a good sign. Will you come to-morrow?"

"No, thank you. I think that I can despatch my fortnight now. I have been in town so long, that the country has become quite a treat again."

"Richmond is a pretty place," said Upton, "we always have a quiet pic-nic here once or twice a-year—make up a little party and come down to enjoy ourselves."

"Are you all here now?" said I, looking round with surprise.

"Every one of us," replied Upton, "even the governor has been induced to leave Simmons, the new clerk, 'alone in his glory;' and mother is one of the party—think of that, Robert! Then," his eyes sparkling, "Dick, who is up for the vacation, he's here, and the Miss Marches, and Mr. and Mrs. March—you have met them at our house, if you remember—and Mr. Heberdeen, a friend of Dick's, and Mr. Heberdeen's sisters."

Tom blushed vividly, and gave a slight cough.

"My friend and I are detaining you from pleasant company," said I, making a movement to withdraw.

"No, no," said Upton; "it is not likely that we are going

to let you off. You must join our party, Robert, and we shall be very glad of Mr. Arrow's company."

"No, Upton," said I, and "Thank you," replied Tom, who seemed rather anxious to accept the invitation.

"Why, you don't mean to say that you will turn your back on our little party, Robert?"

"My dear Upton," said I, "that little party was made up without me, and had I been wanted I think I should have been asked an hour or two earlier. However, I am obliged to you for your invitation,—late it is,—but I would rather not accept it, *now*."

"Why, what will my mother and sisters say, Robert, when I tell them that I have met you? Come along, old fellow."

"No, Upton," I replied, "not to-day, thank you."

"Very well, very well," said Upton in that rapid manner which indicated he was a trifle disturbed; "you are the best judge of what suits you, and so I'll not press you further."

"I think you have been already too pressing, Mr. Woodleigh," observed the Squire's son.

"I think so too, Mr. Heberdeen," I said tartly; "my cousin did not sufficiently study the tastes of his friends—I did! Come, Tom. Good-day, Upton."

But we were not to withdraw so easily; there was fresh opposition to start in our way and hinder separation.

As we turned to depart, six ladies appeared upon the scene,—six abreast too, and right in the way of Tom Arrow and me.

Tom's self-possession vanished on the instant.

"Oh! Lord, here's a lot of girls!" exclaimed Tom, looking wildly round him. "What's to be done? Which way are you going to bolt?"

"My cousins see us."

"I can't help that," cried Tom, becoming very red in the face; "I'm not going to be introduced to all that lot—I should be frightened to death. You see, Bob, I have never been used to the she sex, and, to tell you the truth, it's particularly embarrassing."

"I must speak to them, Tom. Leave go my coat."

"Then you'll find me somewhere over there when you want me," said Tom; "I can't face them with a three-cornered piece out of the leg of my trousers, and—oh! Bob."

"What's the matter now?"

"Harriet—Miss Heberdeen—the black girl in the tall—I

mean—the tall girl in the black dress. I can't stop, upon my word I can't !”

Tom made a feint of strolling off in a *nonchalant* manner, swinging his cane jauntily to and fro ; but to have seen the unsteady and rickety manner in which his legs took him away, and the nervous glances over his shoulder as he proceeded, was to believe him slightly discomposed in mind, and evidently fearful of Miss Heberdeen coming in full chase after him.

My Cousin Upton joined me again, and Mr. Heberdeen advanced towards the ladies.

“ You have altered your mind, Robert.”

“ No, Upton, I have not, but my cousins have recognised me, and I can't walk away like a churl.”

“ Do you know, Robert, you are one of the queerest fellows in the world ? ” said Upton ; “ you are as tetchy as a maid of forty. I really believe you are indignant with us for not formally inviting you to join our little excursion.”

“ Do you think that I am foolish enough, Upton, to consider myself aggrieved ? ” I answered ; “ or ass enough to expect to be always put on an equality with you ? No, no ; I know my place, and will keep it ! ”

“ Equality has nothing to do with it, and we don't want you to keep your place, or to think it beneath our own. You are a Woodleigh, and the Woodleighs have no mean opinion of themselves—now have they ? ”

Before I could reply, the six ladies and Mr. Heberdeen had joined us. There were my Cousins Caroline and Constance, Miss Bowden, two of the Misses March, and Miss Heberdeen. The Misses March were known to me through a previous introduction ; there were seven of them, and the two present at that time were the youngest, and very pretty, laughing, rosy-checked girls they were ; but Miss Heberdeen—how time had altered her with the rest of us ! She had grown a tall, stately girl, with a face that Phidias might have copied for his *Minerva* ; for there was a thoughtful look on her classical features that would have become a grave goddess, if not have assorted well with a *Hebe*. Nevertheless, the expression was more pleasing than severe ; and it was a sadness, not a sternness, of thought that gave a character to her face.

After I had been introduced to Miss Heberdeen, and shaken hands with the rest of the ladies, my Cousin Upton said to his sisters :—

“ I have been persuading Robert to join our party, but

he objects to impromptu invitations and will have none of them."

"Oh! he will alter his mind now that we have come to the rescue, Upton," said Caroline. "Cousin Robert," turning to me, "you must not be so ungallant as to refuse a lady's invitation for yourself and friend—that is your friend strolling away there, is it not?"

"Yes, Miss Woodleigh."

"The same answer will do for the invitation," said Constance; "I am sure you cannot look me in the face and say, 'No,' Robert!"

Miss Heberdeen, her brother, and the Misses March sauntered away over the close green turf, leaving the Cousins Woodleigh with Miss Bowden in earnest debate.

"Well, do you really want me, Constance?—can I be of any service—can my friend and I afford any amusement?"

"Of course you can, Sir," she replied; "we shall have a quadrille after dinner. Upton is especially engaged to play the violin for us, and we shall require some gentlemen partners. You can dance?"

"Yes."

I had lately added the art of dancing to my other accomplishments.

"Then you will join us?"

"If——"

"I will have no *ifs*, Robert," said Constance, and how the ringlets danced as she shook her pretty head! "I am accustomed to obedience at home, and my will is law, even in Richmond Park. If you offer any more objections, I shall think you dislike us."

It was one thing to resist Upton, it was another to say "No" to Constance Woodleigh. Her will was law to me then; I could not look at her, meet the lustre of her blue eyes, and not feel how weak was my resolution as well as my heart. What trouble those few words of my cousin caused me! how they set me thinking and dreaming again! how the bells in the invisible fool's cap jingled after that!

Yet, in this foolish, romantic, rhapsodical first-love, is there such a deal of harm after all? If it don't make us wiser, it keeps the heart and the thoughts pure; it makes us unselfish; it is an antidote to the evil that lurks in the streets. Call this the rule, but think me an exception, for on that day my first-love was to lead me into mischief.

"Had you visited Grove House last Sunday," said Caroline,

"we should have asked you to join us ; but you were better engaged, and so lost your invitation."

"Therefore the jury returns a verdict of 'serve him right,' eh, Miss Bowden?" added Upton.

Miss Bowden, who had been all this time silent and thoughtful, started when she was addressed, and looked up inquiringly.

"I was remarking that if Mr. Robert Woodleigh object to so late an invitation, it is his own fault for not calling upon us last Sunday."

"Hardly his own fault," was the reply.

"Here is a champion for you, Robert," cried Upton ; "Miss Bowden to the rescue!"

"Were I in Mr. Woodleigh's place," said Miss Bowden lightly—so lightly that it struck me that there was an under-current of earnestness lurking in her words—"I should be chary of accepting an invitation made, as it were, by accident."

"Not by accident, Miss Bowden," said Upton ; "had he only looked in last Sunday, you know."

"Or been written to on Monday, *you* know," she replied, in the same light tone.

"Why, Miss Bowden, you are supplying him with fresh objections!" cried Caroline, "and we will hear no more. Robert, we shall expect you and your friend in ten minutes ; that white handkerchief flying from the whip in the distance marks our place of meeting. There is a large party, and your friend must not be frightened."

They sauntered away. Miss Bowden, to my surprise, lingered.

"You join us then, Mr. Robert?" she said, with her full grey eyes fixed on me.

"Yes, Miss Bowden."

"You refused your Cousin Upton?"

"Yes."

"It showed a better spirit, a higher one ; why did you let a few words of another cousin change your determination?"

"I—I—hardly—know!"

Miss Bowden looked hastily in the direction of my cousins, and then said in a low tone:—

"Don't come ; you had better keep away!"

"For what reason?"

"Does it matter the reason, if the warning's a good one?"

"The knowledge of the reason would enable me to test the warning."

"It requires no testing," said Miss Bowden, looking angry ;
"I warned you for your own sake."

"I am obliged to Miss Bowden, but——"

"There, there, there, I will say no more," she cried hastily.
"I have exceeded my province in cautioning you ; what object have I in giving you advice, or in showing my interest in a step-brother ? I will not argue longer with you !"

And Miss Bowden turned her back upon me and sailed away after her companions, leaving me to rejoin Tom Arrow when I had sufficiently recovered from the effects of her singular behaviour.



CHAPTER X.

THE PIC-NIC IN RICHMOND PARK.

"No, my dear Bob, it's no good asking me," said Tom, when I had rejoined him, and found him hiding behind a tree ; "I shan't go—I didn't know that there was such a lot of people there—I would not join them now for another grandmother with three thousand pounds odd !"

"Then I shall not leave Tom Arrow for my cousins."

"Oh ! never mind me, I'll sit here on the grass till the party breaks up ; you'll know this place again, Bob ?"

"Nonsense."

"I couldn't be of the same party as Miss Heberdeen to save my life—good gracious, only think of it ! And then look at the left leg of my trousers, and the fringe that cursed dog has made at the bottom of it. By the way, I have got two pins in my shirt-collar somewhere,—oh ! here they are—now I'll just make myself decent and respectable, and be with you in half a minute. Hope we shan't keep them waiting !"

"What ! do you mean to join them ?"

"Yes, I'll chance it. I'm as good as they are ; why should I lose an opportunity of seeing Harriet Heberdeen again ?—Come on, Bob, what are you waiting for ?"

"I haven't quite made up my own mind, Tom."

"Oh ! come, that's too bad," cried Tom, "to begin aggra-

vating me now that I have screwed up my courage to the sticking place ; think of the delightful day we shall have—don't be bashful, there's a good fellow. Come along, how slow you are ! ”

Tom Arrow and I set forth in search of the pic-nic party, which we experienced no difficulty in discovering. We both advanced timidly, for we both felt that to a certain extent we were intruders on the large circle of friends assembled to make merry in the old park at Richmond.

However, our welcome from the majority was a warm one, and the coldness of young Heberdeen did not trouble us much. I had been half fearful of meeting Squire Heberdeen there also—he who had first christened me “a black sheep ”—and was relieved to find by a hasty glance that he was not one of the party.

The party consisted of twenty-two persons, exclusive of one or two nondescript individuals who had the care of some hampers in the distance. There was the large family of the Marches—*paterfamilias*, a great man in the City, and consequently an important and prosy old gentleman ; *materfamilias*, a lady on a large scale ; and *filiaefamilias*, seven of them, all ages, from fifteen upwards, all in gipsy hats and book-muslin dresses, with tucks up to the waist ! There was the lion of the party, Cousin Dick, of course, a model of ease and elegance ; and there were my uncle and aunt, Constance, and the rest of my cousins. Then there were young Heberdeen, his sister, and Miss Bowden ; and, last and not least, Mr. Arrow and myself.

It was a large and, to all appearance, a happy group ; everybody seemed to have come out with the honest intention of enjoying the day, and even Mr. March and Uncle Woodleigh did not talk much of business over their early dinner. And what a dinner it was ! What a store of good things poured from the hampers, and what justice was done to the feast which the Woodleighs—in conjunction with Fortnum and Mason—had provided. Those pic-nics in the summer time, under the blue sky, and in the heart of an English park, are pleasant reunions, and are worth a hundred fashionable *soirées*—they are truly English, too, and perhaps only an Englishman can thoroughly enjoy them. Who cannot remember one or two of them in his life, and who—always excepting Robert Woodleigh—has not marked them with a white stone ? The dinner passed off in excellent style ; there was plenty of laughing and jesting at those little inconveniences which an open-air repast

necessarily occasions ; there was some flirting between Upton and the seven Miss Marches, and Dick Woodleigh, who sat opposite me, was paying marked attention to Miss Heberdeen. Dick Woodleigh was less languid and fantastical that particular day ; the charms of the Squire's daughter had roused him from his apathy, and his conversation, which was evidently animated, seemed to make a certain impression upon his fair visitor. Miss Bowden, who was sitting next me, and had maintained so strict a silence that I had almost forgotten her presence, said in a low tone, towards the conclusion of the repast :—

“ Rapt in admiration of Miss Heberdeen, Mr. Woodleigh ? ”

“ No, Miss Bowden,” I answered ; “ I was only thinking——”

“ What a handsome pair they are opposite,” she added. “ I believe others are of the same opinion. I caught that thought in Mrs. Woodleigh's eyes a moment since.”

“ Well, they are a handsome pair—don't you think so ? ”

“ Miss Heberdeen is very pretty,” remarked Miss Bowden, “ and I suppose some people would consider your Cousin Richard a handsome man ; but neither Miss Heberdeen nor Mr. Richard Woodleigh is quite to my taste.”

“ Ah ! you are hard to please, Miss Bowden.”

“ Very,” she responded, drily.

Miss Bowden was hard to please, that day at least, and was certainly not the happiest of the party.

The repast concluded, and a few champagne bottles emptied, Upton Woodleigh unlocked his violin case.

“ Now then, ladies and gentlemen, I have not brought my violin to Richmond for nothing,” said Upton ; “ so ‘ Come, let us dance upon the heath,’ as the witches say,—Mr. Arrow, you dance ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! ” answered Arrow, who had been also an observer of the dialogue between Miss Heberdeen and my cousin. “ What will you have, Mr. Woodleigh—a hornpipe ? ”

Tom's effort at pleasantry went down very well ; a small joke goes a great way amongst good-tempered people, and so the Miss Marches and some of my cousins laughed, and set Mr. Arrow down for a wag. Tom did not look much like a wag, though, at that particular moment ; he was frowning at Cousin Dick, and biting his finger-nails in as ferocious a manner as it was possible for him to assume, and that was a very mild air of ferociousness, indeed.

Tom, however, drank some more champagne and cheered

up amazingly ; he recovered his good spirits, got over his bashfulness when addressing the ladies, and was soon making himself generally agreeable.

I did not join in the first quadrille ; I had been forestalled in my choice of a partner by young Heberdeen, who had obtained the hand of that cousin of mine with whom I had been silly enough to fall in love. Miss Heberdeen and Richard Woodleigh were partners in the first quadrille also, whilst two of the Misses March, Tom Arrow, and my Cousin Caroline completed the figure of eight. The rest of the company sauntered about the park, or sat on the grass and looked on. I was one of the gazers, and Ponto, the terrier, who appeared to have repented of his bad habits, was blinking up at Upton Woodleigh and admiring his violin performance.

I soon grew tired of watching Cousin Constance dance with Edmund Heberdeen, for although she danced very well, and appeared to enjoy it—what maiden of sweet seventeen objects to a dance, I wonder !—I took no pleasure in the sight, especially as Mr. Heberdeen was as courteous to Constance as Cousin Dick was to his sister. Constance seemed embarrassed at times by the attentions of young Heberdeen, which I took for a good sign ; and once she blushed at something he said in a low tone, which I took for a bad one.

"Well, aunt," said I, turning to Mrs. Woodleigh, who was sitting near me, comfortably propped up by cushions, "I am glad to find you strong enough for such an expedition as this."

"Thank you, Robert," replied my aunt, "I never expected to indulge in this amusement again ; but as my boy Richard was home for the vacation, and anxious for his poor mother to form one of the party, I could not find it in my heart to refuse, though I have no doubt I shall be half dead with rheumatism before the week is out. What a sweet girl Miss Heberdeen is," added my aunt, surveying that young lady through her eye-glass ; "Miss Bowden," turning to her companion, who was sitting with little Mary's hand in hers, "don't you think Miss Heberdeen a very sweet girl ?"

"Pretty, but insipid," replied Miss Bowden.

"Insipid ! my dear Miss Bowden," exclaimed my aunt ; "I was just fancying what a deal of expression there was in her face."

Miss Bowden did not reply ; she kept her eyes fixed on the dancers, and not a single movement escaped her. She looked

so grave also, that even Mrs. Woodleigh remarked it, and asked if she were unwell.

"The heat is somewhat oppressive," was the reply, "but I am very well, thank you."

"You looked so thoughtful, dear, that I was afraid you felt ill."

"Oh ! no."

Miss Bowden appearing to object to my Aunt Woodleigh's inquiries, I asked my aunt, "How long she had been acquainted with the Heberdeens ?"

"Young Mr. Heberdeen called at Grove House last Sunday—what a nice young man he is !"

"Very !"

"And Miss Heberdeen was introduced to us to-day, for the first time."

"Indeed—for the first time !"

"Not introduced to Richard for the first time," she added ; "he has known Miss Heberdeen some months ; and between you and me, Robert," observed the communicative old lady, "I don't think Richard goes to Windsor so often for nothing."

Aunt Woodleigh tittered in rather an imbecile manner, and looked first at me and then at Miss Bowden, to see how far her joke was appreciated. Miss Bowden did not relax a muscle of her face, or bestow one glance upon the speaker ; and I, surprised at the mention of Windsor, inquired "If the Heberdeens had left Nettleton ?"

"Yes, ever since Mrs. Heberdeen's death," was my aunt's reply ; "not that the poor lady's death was the sole reason for quitting ; some tiresome law-suit or other, I believe, was at the bottom of it. You see it was Mrs. Heberdeen's property only for life, or Mr. Heberdeen's, or somebody else's,—perhaps the ground landlord's, I really forget,—but it so happened—dear me, I don't know how it happened, now I come to think of it ! How gracefully my dear boy dances, to be sure—handsome fellow !"

But the quadrille was at an end, and there was no further opportunity of admiring the handsome fellow's evolutions.

The talking, the laughing, the popping of champagne-corks recommenced after the dance ; Miss Heberdeen left Richard Woodleigh for his sister Constance ; young Heberdeen joined his college friend, and Tom Arrow returned to my side.

"I'm glad we came here, Bob," said Tom, in a stage-whisper ; "I say, isn't she a fine girl ?"

"Miss Heberdeen?—Yes."

"No, not Miss Heberdeen — Miss Woodleigh," said Tom, "the girl I danced with—she's worth a dozen Miss Heberdeens, I know."

"I thought Miss Heberdeen was incomparable."

"Incomparably stuck-up," grumbled Arrow; "did you see her look at me during the quadrille? If I had been one of my father's carboys—the red one—she could not have treated me with greater indifference. She knew me fast enough, but she wouldn't even say, 'How d'ye do, Mr. Arrow?' I wonder she came to the pic-nic if she thinks herself so much better than other people!"

"Hush!—I think you are mistaken—don't talk so loud."

"Oh! I don't care," said Tom, recklessly, "she is not everybody—no more is her prig of a brother. Let us have some wine. Do you think there would be any objection, Bob, in asking Miss Woodleigh to dance with me again?"

"It is not exactly etiquette."

"Where did you learn etiquette, you rascal?" said Tom, with a laugh,—“and what do you know about it? Never mind, I'll ask another of your cousins—the one with the ringlets, when I get a chance.”

"Why don't you ask Miss Heberdeen?"

"Oh! no, we never mention her," sang Tom.

"I don't think there will be any more dancing—this is not a ball-room, and people have not come here to make fools of themselves."

"Hollo, Bob, has anything gone wrong?"

"I'm tired of this nonsense. I wish I had never joined the party."

"Well, I was just thinking what a merry party it was, and how nice and sociable everybody was, except Mr. Heberdeen and that little boy there who is eating the strawberries in an indelicate and wholesale manner—who is he?"

"Another cousin."

"He'll be ill before he gets home," said Tom; "it's lucky there is—ahem—a medical man here. There she goes!"

"Who?"

"That pretty cousin of yours, with the ringlets; she has left Miss Heberdeen—so if there is to be any more dancing, here goes to engage her for a partner."

"One moment, Tom, I——"

But Tom was out of hearing — his impulsive nature had

overcome his reserve towards the fair sex ; and I was compelled to sit on the grass and watch with a gloomy frown his advances to Constance.

Constance Woodleigh was not engaged, for I saw her smile and bow an assent to Tom's request.

My eyes were still on Constance Woodleigh, when a soft little voice at my side attracted my attention.

"Are you not going to dance, Cousin Robert ? "

I looked round. Little Mary Woodleigh and Miss Bowden were by my side.

"Presently, I think, Mary—that is, if this dancing continue."

"Perhaps you object to dancing, Mr. Woodleigh ? " asked Miss Bowden, whose face wore still its hard expression, and forcibly reminded me of my strong-minded step-father.

"Open-air dancing is something like open-air preaching," I replied, "out of the common way, and perhaps out of place."

"Neither quite agrees with the refined taste of Mr. Robert Woodleigh ? "

Miss Bowden said it so bitterly that even Mary Woodleigh looked up in the face of her governess.

"You are satirical, Miss Bowden," was my answer.

She gave a little short laugh—quite a Markingham laugh—as she replied :—

"Yet I came not from a satirical family."

"Are you fond of dancing ? " I asked.

"Yes, very fond."

"Why do you not join in the festivities, then ? "

"Perhaps because I am not asked—perhaps because I am not well."

"If the former be the reason, pray allow me——"

"Stop, stop, Mr. Woodleigh," cried Miss Bowden ; "I was not hinting for a partner. If I dance at all, Mary will be my partner—will you not, dear ? "

"I don't want to dance with any one else."

"Not sister Constance ? " asked Miss Bowden.

"Oh ! she will have so many partners—everybody wants to dance with her—I wonder what for ? "

A shadow on the grass—somebody between us and the sun—Mr. Richard Woodleigh, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pocket, bowing to Miss Bowden, and smiling in an amiable manner.

"Miss Bowden, will you favour me with your hand for the

next dance? My brother Upton insists upon us turning Richmond Park into Arcadia."

"Arcadia will get on very well without me, Mr. Woodleigh."

"Are you engaged for the next dance?"

"No."

"Why then——?"

"I shall not dance to-day!"

"May I inquire the reason, Miss Bowden?"

"Does Mr. Richard Woodleigh require a reason for everything?" asked Miss Bowden, with a searching look.

"An explanation is always satisfactory."

"But it is not my place to satisfy your curiosity," replied she; "I hope you will allow that, Sir?"

"Oh! certainly."

Dick frowned a little as Miss Bowden and his sister walked away; then he observed, with a shrug of the shoulders:—

"You see more of Miss Bowden than I, Robert—what do you think of her?"

"I think she is a nice girl—a girl with a very good heart."

"You are in love with her?"

"Oh! no."

"You speak warmly," said Dick, "and that always arouses suspicion, although I cannot think you old enough to know what the 'tender passion' means. You talk about her good heart, Robert—don't you admire her good temper?"

"I don't see Miss Bowden very often," I answered, shortly.

Dick yawned, and leaned his back against a tree.

"It's my misfortune to meet with bad-tempered friends at every turn," said he; "it's precious hard!"

I was rather surprised at this outburst, which *seemed* to have rushed forth in spite of him, but before I could make any comment, he said suddenly:—

"Talking about friends, who is this Arrow?"

"A friend of *mine*."

"Yes, yes, I know that; but what is he?—how came he here?—did you bring him?—who asked him?"

"Your brothers and sisters asked him, and I did not *bring* him—he came of his own accord."

"Sharp," said Dick, *sotto voce*; then he added in his natural tones, "but you have not told me what he is, and for a private reason of my own, I am rather anxious to know."

"He is a medical student."

"The Count, that is Heberdeen—we call him the Count at

college because of his lofty notions—says that he is the son of a druggist in Nettleton, and as Heberdeen once lived in Nettleton himself, why, it is hardly pleasant to——”

“I lived in Nettleton too, Richard,” said I, interrupting him; “and am, I dare say, a something that also offends the eye of Edmund Heberdeen, but I presume that we all stand on an equality, for *to-day* at least, and if Mr. Heberdeen’s ‘lofty notions’ be disturbed, why, he can find his way out of Richmond Park without any difficulty.”

Richard Woodleigh’s fine eyebrows lowered, and he looked at me from beneath them with an expression that was not hereditary in his family. He was about to reply, when the subject of our conversation advanced towards us.

“Now, Woodleigh,” said he to Dick; “the ladies are waiting for their partners. It will not do for two gentlemen of the party to stand aloof from the festivities. There’s Mr. Arrow, in solitary grandeur at present—the only gallant of the party; he’s going to dance with your sister.”

“The deuce he is!”

“Oh! it can’t be helped, Woodleigh, now he is here. I suppose he will ask *my* sister next!”

“And if he should take so unwarrantable a liberty, Mr. Heberdeen?” I inquired between my set teeth.

Mr. Heberdeen just glanced at me, but did not reply to the question which I took the liberty of repeating slowly and distinctly.

“Come on, Ned,” cried Dick, passing his arm through Heberdeen’s; “what will the ladies think of us?”

And, whether anxious to avoid a war of words between me and Heberdeen, or really solicitous to secure a partner, he hurried his friend away.

I looked after Ned Heberdeen with no very loving glance; I ground my teeth together and wished myself with him in a shady lane at Nettleton for a quarter of an hour or so; I walked away from the dancers, then suddenly altered my mind and walked back again. It would not do to keep aloof from my friends, and show all my bad tempers. I was arousing suspicion; Miss Bowden, who was dancing with her little companion, had her eyes upon me—why was she so interested in me that day?—and there were four Misses March, my Cousin Caroline, and Miss Heberdeen, all disengaged. Miss Heberdeen had taken a seat by my aunt’s side, and my aunt was talking of her children and her ailments, and

evidently boring the Squire's daughter. Had I cared for the dance itself, I would have preferred dancing with Caroline Woodleigh to any of those disengaged, but Miss Heberdeen seemed to draw me towards her, and the secret satisfaction of giving annoyance to her brother seconded me in the sudden resolution which I formed.

"Miss Heberdeen, may I request the honour of your hand for this waltz?"

I was surprised to find Miss Heberdeen receive me with a gracious smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Woodleigh, but I never waltz."

"Have you an objection to the dance, Miss Heberdeen?" asked my aunt.

"A little objection, perhaps," she answered; "but my father, the Squire, has his scruples, and I never waltz, to please him. I am sure Mr. Woodleigh will excuse me?"

"Certainly, Miss Heberdeen."

"Mrs. Woodleigh tells me that you have resided in Nettleton, Sir," said Miss Heberdeen, addressing me; "does not Richmond Park remind you of Nettleton Woods?"

"This portion of it—yes."

"How many a pleasant day have I spent in the dear old woods before—we went into mourning," she concluded with a sigh.

"You do not remember my nephew at Nettleton, Miss Heberdeen?" asked my aunt, anxious to disturb any sorrowful meditation of the dark-eyed beauty.

Miss Heberdeen looked at me rather shily for a moment.

"I think I remember the face, although it was a boy's when I last saw it—oh! yes, I know now—your mother is still living in Nettleton—Mrs. Bowden?"

"Yes; the same."

She did not freeze or grow in the least chilly upon making the discovery, as I might have anticipated from one of the race of Heberdeen; on the contrary, she appeared to become more amiable and gentle. It was a pleasure to her, perhaps, to meet with some one who knew Nettleton, and was as familiar with its quiet precincts as herself.

"I left Nettleton with regret," said Miss Heberdeen; "it was a favourite spot of mine, and I could not understand my father's anxiety to quit it. I suppose," turning to Mrs. Woodleigh, "all those associations connected with a home where a loved one has been lost are a source of pain to stern minds."

"Your brother tells me that the title to your property at Nettleton is disputed," said Mrs. Woodleigh.

"Yes, perhaps justly," was the reply. "I have not gone deeply into the subject—law is a hard, dry entertainment for ladies. Your mother," to me, "is quite well, I hope, Mr. Woodleigh?"

"Thank you, quite well, I believe."

"I had not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Bowden intimately," she remarked, "but I have heard many good reports concerning her. She is a happy, warm-hearted, Christian lady!"

"She is as happy as most people in this world, Miss Heberdeen," I said, "for she has faith enough to see good in everything that befalls her."

"Spoken like a son, Robert," cried my aunt, with glistening eyes; "my dear nephew, how glad I am to hear you speak so well of your mother. My Upton would speak like that, so would my dear son Dick—both mother's boys!"

Aunt Woodleigh, after wiping her eyes, said:—

"Do you know, Robert—you must forgive my mentioning this—that my impression was you did not love your mother very, *very* much."

"Indeed, aunt."

"My own dear boys would never have run away from home and left their mother alone,—not," she added firmly, "under any circumstances."

"They will never have the trial, aunt," I said in reply, "they will—but by-gones are by-gones. I did wrong."

Miss Heberdeen had evidently heard of my rash action—everybody in a country town soon learns the affairs of the inhabitants—and my aunt's remark seemed to recall it to her memory.

"I remember you now," said she, smiling; "I have heard my papa speak of you."

"Not very favourably, Miss Heberdeen."

"Not very unfavourably, Mr. Woodleigh," she replied; "he used to speak of your faults, certainly, but he thought that you were a real English boy—a boy of great spirit—and would make a good—shall I go on?"

"Certainly"

"A good soldier."

"I generally managed to appear to Squire Heberdeen in my worst colours—the fifth of November and Nettleton Fair for

instance," I answered ; " and I certainly was not the best of boys."

" And could not Mr. Bowden control you ? "

I shook my head.

" He is a very good man, and a very clever one."

" Have you heard him preach, Miss Heberdeen ? " I inquired.

" Several times, until papa interdicted my visits to that little chapel on the hill ; he was afraid that I should turn Methodist, I think."

" Was there any fear ? " asked my aunt.

" Oh ! no—only Mr. Bowden could preach a sermon, and the Rev. Matthew Williams could not, poor man. Mr. Bowden is no relation to that young lady dancing with your little girl, I presume ? "

" Well, I really don't know—I think she is a distant relation, is she not, Robert ? "

" I think she is."

The waltz was at an end ; Upton gave the last flourish with his bow, and the dancers advanced towards us.

" If no gentleman understands playing the violin," said Upton, blowing vigorously, " I regret that I shall have to put an end to the experiments on the light fantastic toe, having fiddled myself into delirium tremens."

" I'm not a finished instrumentalist, Mr. Woodleigh," said Tom Arrow, after resigning his charge of my Cousin Constance, " but I shall be happy to become your unworthy substitute. My friend," with a wave of his hand towards me, " will also have great pleasure in whistling the Lancers, the Caledonians, and the Cachuca."

Tom was in excellent spirits, and, having become used to the company, had recovered all his native impudence. He was quite the lady's man, too, attentive with the fruit and wine, and, in fact, all that was amiable and good-tempered. He was not two minutes in one place ; he was full of energy and excitement, and anxious to see everybody comfortable. One began to wonder how the pic-nic party would have got on without him, and my aunt said to me in a low tone :—

" What a very agreeable young man Mr. Arrow is ! You must bring him to Paddington, Robert."

Mr. Heberdeen and Mr. Richard Woodleigh were not of my aunt's opinion ; they stood and scowled at Tom from a distance, they muttered curses on his impudence, they shrugged their shoulders and turned up their aristocratic noses at him, and

Tom Arrow either did not notice them, or made himself more agreeable in order to aggravate them.

But this studied contempt exhibited towards my friend, proceeding from a cousin in the first instance and from a proud enemy in the second, annoyed me in no small degree, and a disappointment that quickly ensued soured my temper for the remainder of the day.

I was near Cousin Constance at last, standing by her side and looking into her bright face.

"Are you tired of dancing, Constance?" I asked.

"Tired, cousin!" she replied, "oh! I am too fond of dancing—ever to be tired of it."

"Then," said I, more huskily, "may I ask you to favour me next dance, Constance?"

"I am engaged next dance, Robert," was the answer.

"Indeed—to whom?" I said, quickly.

She blushed as she replied:—

"Is that a fair question?"

"I did not know that it was a secret," I said, gloomily.

"It is no secret, Robert," she replied. "I am engaged to Mr. Heberdeen."

"To him again!" I exclaimed, with a degree of earnestness that was decidedly unwarrantable under the circumstances—"what right has he"—I met her astonished look—"I beg pardon, Constance!"

"What right has he to—what?" she asked, with a sparkle in her eyes which revealed a sense of wounded pride.

"Nothing."

"I insist upon knowing, Cousin Robert," she said, decisively.

"It will not afford you any pleasure—may possibly pain you," I replied. "Why do you wish to know the rest of the foolish words that I might have uttered?"

"You were going to ask a question of me, were you not?"

"Yes."

"Ask it, please. I may give you a satisfactory reply."

I bit my lip, and looked down at the grass. I felt that I had betrayed myself by my impetuosity; felt that my abruptness had brought the flush to her cheek, and given that tremor to her voice. Still, I was her slave, her will was law to me; God knows I loved her very dearly then!

"I was about to ask," I stammered, "what right he had to monopolise your favour, to hinder those who have known you longer and esteem you more, from the pleasure of dancing

with you. It was a very foolish question to put, and one made in the heat of disappointment."

"Disappointment!"

"I have been waiting for this opportunity so long; watching you, Constance, for this chance," said I, "little thinking that, at the end of your first dance with Mr. Heberdeen, he had engaged you for the third."

The red flush deepened, and seemed to burn into her brow; her hands, which were clasped together, trembled, and she bent her head down till the gipsy hat hid everything but the fair glossy curls that wanted from it.

"Oh! Constance, don't say that I have offended you," I murmured. "I wish to explain, and I commit myself more by the folly of my explanation—I don't know what I am doing. I know I am a fool to think of—I mean to talk like this! I did not mean to give you pain, cousin—I would not do *that* for all the world!"

"Do leave me!" she cried, impatiently; "I don't wish to speak to you any more, now."

I was about to reply in the same wild, incoherent manner, when young Heberdeen suddenly stood beside us. The sight of my rival—was he not my rival even then?—cast a shadow on my heart, and made it full of envy.

"Your partner, Constance," I said in a low voice, and with a fierce glance at Heberdeen, which was as fiercely returned.

"I am afraid your cousin has been seeking to usurp my place in the next dance, Miss Woodleigh," he remarked.

"Miss Woodleigh has informed me she is already engaged, Sir."

Mr. Heberdeen bowed.

"May I ask if you are quite ready, Miss Woodleigh?" said Heberdeen. "Your cousin's intimate friend is becoming very impatient to show off in his new character of violinist. He is an ambitious young man, I should say."

He extended his hand to Constance. I saw their hands together—his contemptuous words were ringing in my ears.

"His most intimate friend," I said, "is not likely to listen quietly to your gentlemanly sneers, and may forget himself, the place, and the company, as well as Mr. Heberdeen." And, with a look that would have become the Bravo of Venice, I stalked back to the side of my aunt, and sat myself down on the grass with an unenviable fermentation going on within me.

"Are you not going to dance?" cried Upton, advancing.

"I hate dancing!"

"You don't mean that?"

"The place is not suitable; besides, I am clumsy, and have not learned at the most fashionable school."

"Here, let us have some more champagne," cried Upton; "that'll revive your spirits, Robert. Don't you feel well?"

"Very well, thank you."

"You look pale, I think. Here's a glass—look out."

Pop went the cork, the wine sparkled into my glass, and was recklessly consigned down my throat.

"Have any more?"

"Fill away, Upton. I have a strong head."

"There now, come along," cried Upton, "you must not sit there as glum as if you were at your desk, and had four columns of figures to sum up. There's Carry wants a partner, I know."

"Certainly I do," said Caroline Woodleigh, advancing. "Now, Cousin Robert, we need not stand upon ceremony and etiquette, you and I. Are you ready?"

"Quite ready, thank you."

"How dull you are to-day!"

"Do you think so?" said I, hoarsely.

"I am sure so."

"It's all fancy. I'm not dull, cousin," I answered. "What dance is it?"

"Another quadrille—the last before our gipsy tea."

How I got through that quadrille I know not to the present day; I have a remembrance of walking the figures in a dreamy state; stumbling over my own feet, or catching them in the light dresses of the ladies; of the two round blue eyes of Caroline looking intently, even a little anxiously, at me; of a certain couple dancing near us, who had forgotten me, and were laughing and chatting together in the most friendly manner. I know the dance came to an end, and that Tom Arrow, who had played execrably throughout, wound up with a cat-like noise, above the bridge of the violin, which set everybody's teeth on edge; that the ladies began to arrange the tea-equipage on the grass, and that the gentlemen strolled away into the park to enjoy their cigars at a respectful distance from the fair sex.

There were eight of us. My Uncle Woodleigh and Mr. March; my Cousins Dick, Upton, and Johnny; Mr. Heber-

deen, Tom Arrow, and myself. It was not pleasant walking, for Johnny's affection for me was painfully obtrusive, and he gambolled round me, and over my feet and on to them, and hung by my arms in a playful but embarrassing manner.

"Well, Robert," said my uncle, addressing me for the first time, "have you spent a pleasant day?"

"Oh! very pleasant indeed!" I exclaimed.

"Thought you were looking rather down."

"Down?"

"Yes—ill, out of sorts, or something. I suppose you are sick of holiday making?"

"Nearly."

"Ah! you take after me and Upton; I don't think that we have had a fortnight's holiday in our lives; I'm sure I haven't—it would drive me mad!"

Mr. Woodleigh turned to Mr. March; Johnny made a rush at his brother Dick, and Tom Arrow joined me. My friend's remark was similar to that which I had heard thrice already.

"Upon my word, Bob, you are looking queer."

"Am I?" replied I; "well, I have a headache."

"Will you allow me to open a vein in your temple?" asked Tom, producing a small lancet from his waistcoat pocket; "it will relieve you wonderfully."

"I am in no humour for larking, Tom," said I, churlishly, "and I heartily wish that I had not come here—Miss Bowden told me I should regret it."

"I don't regret it," said Tom; "and I don't see why you should. What a nice girl your Cousin Constance is!"

"Yes, I know."

"She's worth a dozen of any of them—upon my word, Bob, if I were to see much of her, I should be clean done for."

"I thought my Cousin Caroline was a very nice girl, and worth a dozen of Miss Heberdeen."

"So she is, but I like her sister better, now I come to think of it. I say, I'm not cutting you out, am I?"

Tom quite jumped at the hoarse laugh which I gave for a reply.

"Ah! I thought not," said he; "you are a man of business and ledgers, and balance-sheets have no connection with the sentimental. Young Heberdeen is touched, Bob."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. You should see him look at her, and you should

see her blush. It's a case between them. What a lucky fellow Heberdeen is ! ”

“ He's a proud hound ! ” I said maliciously.

“ Come, I say, Bob, none of that,” cried Tom ; “ we are all of one party, you know—don't let us backbite each other in this style.”

“ Do you think Heberdeen has been sparing in his comments on us ?—has not been amusing his college friend with sketches of the two dirty town boys who used to call after him in the streets ? ”

“ Likely enough. I don't care.”

“ I do. He shall say no more against me or my friends. His position should teach him better manners, and if not, why, I must teach him myself.”

Tom indulged in his characteristic whistle.

“ Whew—you are in a nice temper ! Have you been drinking much wine, Robert ? ”

“ Not I.”

“ You have not been dancing a great deal, and you have stuck uncommonly close to the bottles.”

“ I drank ~~wine~~ with my Cousin Upton.”

“ And with Mr. March, and your uncle, and some of the Misses March ; I saw you.”

“ Did you think I was going to sit still, and listen to your horrid scraping on the violin ? ”

“ Oh ! if you are going to insult your best friends, I have done,” cried Tom. “ What ! are you going to smoke ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Headstrong youth,” said Tom ; “ if I—hollo, here's that cursed dog again ! ”

Sure enough, Ponto, the unamiable terrier, came tearing along the park after his master, or Tom's legs, it was uncertain which.

“ I say, Mr. Heberdeen,” cried Tom, “ we don't want any more of your dog's polite attention, if you can help it.”

“ You must help yourselves, gentlemen,” said young Heberdeen, adding something in a lower tone to Dick, that elicited a laugh.

“ Let them laugh, Tom,” I muttered ; “ if young Heberdeen thinks we are going to repeat our comic dance for the amusement of himself and friend, he will find himself mistaken.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ You will see.”

The dog—whether obeying a signal made by its master or not is uncertain—made a rush at us, barking, and snapping, and showing all its teeth, and Tom leaped in the air and gave a flourish with his cane. There was a laugh, which was suddenly changed into an exclamation of astonishment as I flung myself on the dog, struggled with it for a moment on the ground, received its teeth through the fleshy part of my arm, and caught its hairy throat at last between my hands.

Writing this in calmer moments, after years have passed, I feel my heart beat a little quicker at the reminiscence ; feel a flush, perhaps of shame, steal to my face and settle there. What actuated me in so foolish a deed I can hardly tell ; there was more than one reason, less than one excuse. Perhaps I had taken too much wine ; perhaps Heberdeen's pride, or insolence, had heated my brain ; perhaps Cousin Constance was at the bottom of it ; perhaps I was miserable, half mad and half drunk, and, with that strange desire that has seized me more than once in my life, wished to do something that by its very wildness should startle everybody.

"Let the dog go !" cried Upton ; "what are you going to do?—are you mad, Robert?—let the dog loose!"

"Hasn't he lived long enough?" I cried, looking up, and still wrestling with the dog.

"Mr. Woodleigh, release my dog ; it will be better for you," shouted young Heberdeen, standing before me with clenched hands and heaving chest.

"Not till the master apologises for the dog's behaviour," I cried.

"Robert, don't be foolish," said Upton ; "what's the matter with you?"

"I have had quite enough of Mr. Heberdeen's insolence to-day. I believe he set this dog upon me and my friend, and now his dog must suffer for it!"

"Let go, Bob, there's a good fellow," cried Tom ; "you'll choke the beast!"

"So much the better."

"You will have the ladies here in a moment."

"Robert Woodleigh," cried my uncle, suddenly losing his temper after his customary manner, "you forget yourself ; this is unseemly and foolish, disrespectful to me and my friends. Let the dog go, Sir."

"No."

"I insist upon it," cried Uncle Woodleigh, stamping with

both feet at once. "I have been always accustomed to obedience from my——"

"Enough, Sir, enough," I interrupted hastily. "I don't want to be told that I am your servant before this company—they know it well enough: they have treated me accordingly."

"Will you let that dog loose?" shouted Heberdeen.

"No, I will not."

There was a rush towards me. I became conscious of the faces of Upton, Richard and young Heberdeen close to mine—of their hands upon my arms—of a desperate struggle, ending in the escape of the dog, half dead, from my grasp—of my staggering to my feet, making a dash at Heberdeen, and being withheld by Upton and Tom Arrow.

"Let go, Tom—do you think I can stand this?" I entreated. "Don't you think I have had insults enough heaped on me to-day?"

"No one has insulted you, Robert," said Upton; "it is a mistake; you are excited, and don't know what you are saying."

"Did not my uncle taunt me with being his servant, take the part of Heberdeen, and school me before his friends? I'll not stand it!"

"Robert Woodleigh," cried my uncle, white with passion, "after what has passed to-day, I must request you to retire from this company. I have done with you, Sir, from this moment. I never want to see you again."

"Be it so—you never shall, Sir!"

All that followed was more dream-like—the figures round me seemed to melt away and leave me with Tom Arrow. There was a long silence, broken at last by Tom saying:—

"This is a pretty mess, all of a sudden, Bob. I'm hanged if I don't think you *are* going mad!"

"I have had enough to make me mad to-day."

"Enough wine?"

"Enough insults, enough——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Tom; "we know all about that, and now what is to be done next, Bob?"

"Go home."

"Won't you wait here till you are a little cooler, then go back and say——"

"I shall say nothing," I cried. "You heard them say that they had done with me—I am content; I shall be much happier

away. I have been only miserable in my uncle's office, have never known my right position, have been treated first as a friend, then as a servant, then as an enemy. I hope that I may die, Tom, when I enter the service of the Woodleighs again !”

“There, there—let us get home.”

“No, you go back.”

“That’s very likely,” said Arrow. “No, my old boy, we’ll stick together, in the right way or the wrong, and I think it’s wrong to-night—they can get on without me very nicely, not a doubt of it. Hold up, Bob ; now are you ready ?”

“Quite.”

“Then quick march.”

As in a dream still, Tom and I walked out of the park towards the railway station, both silent, and both full of no very pleasant thoughts.



CHAPTER XI.

UNLOOKED-FOR VISITORS.

THE keen eyes of Stephen Markingham, philosopher, saw immediately that there was “something wrong” when I entered the two-pair front on the morning of the following day.

“Good-morning, Woodleigh,” said Markingham ; “will you have any breakfast ?”

“No, thank you, Sir.”

“What’s the matter ?”

“The matter is that I have been making a fool of myself, Mr. Markingham,” I said bluntly, “that I have given up all my friends and relations.”

“Or they have given you up—which ?”

“Given me up, if you like it better.”

“It sounds more probable,” said he, sipping his coffee. “Let us say given you up. But when did you see these kind relations of yours ? I thought that you spent yesterday at Richmond with Mr. Arrow.”

“Yes, and I met my cousins, my uncle and aunt, and a lot more people there. I joined their party, and——”

“And the party did not treat you kindly, or pay you that at-

tention which your inestimable merits deserved. Proceed, slighted being, who——”

“If you are going on like that, I shall *proceed* to leave the room, Mr. Markingham,” said I, reddening with indignation.

“Continue your love-story—I am silent.”

“It isn’t a love-story.”

“Oh ! then it will be all the more entertaining ; love-stories are so prosy nowadays,” he replied. “Begin, Woodleigh, friend of my soul ; I am really interested, and now,” passing his hand over his face as though smoothing something away, “really serious.”

I took a seat on the rickety sofa, and commenced my story. Mr. Markingham did not interrupt me by any comments, satirical or otherwise ; he heard me patiently to the end, expressed no surprise at the mention of young Heberdeen and his sister, and smiled slightly at the recital of my encounter with the dog.

“That is all ? ” he asked when I had brought my narrative to a conclusion.

I nodded my head.

“What course do you mean to pursue, Woodleigh ? ”

“Get another place—become a clerk to a stranger, whose taunts I can better put up with. What is there else to do ?—my namesakes have done with me ! ”

“Perhaps they will——”

“I will never go back,” I interrupted ; “they took his (Heberdeen’s) part because he was rich, well educated, and not their servant, as I was. They sided with him, though he set his dog upon me and Tom, though he had been sneering at us all day, though——”

“Gently, gently,” cried Mr. Markingham ; “you lost your temper after your old fashion, and, as you justly observed at the commencement of this interview, made a fool of yourself—shall I say after your old fashion too ? ”

“If it amuse you, Mr. Markingham, pray say what you please.”

“Giving way to idle rage is not philosophy.”

“I never said that it was,” I growled.

“The evening’s amusement does not bear the morning’s reflection, Woodleigh, and therefore your temper is still ruffled. Well, I will not preach to you,” he said ; “I haven’t a right. I wasn’t always the frozen atomy you see now. I was once as irritable, as hard to please, and as proud as yourself, and I

suppose that similitude, for a mysterious reason, makes me *almost* like you."

"I said that I would die before I entered the Woodleigh service again."

"I might have said the same once."

"Shall I go to my uncle and beg his pardon—beg young Heberdeen's?" I said. "Why, they will think that I am coming back for the sake of my place!"

"Certainly they will."

"I'll never go back—upon my soul, Mr. Markingham, I'll never do work for them again—I'll starve first!"

"Starvation is not philosophy, and to throw up a good situation for the sake of asserting your independence, is not the purest wisdom in the world. Still, I have no doubt these *trade-jacks*," he added, with bitter emphasis, "give themselves vulgar airs, have no fine feelings, and wound, hour after hour, those luckless beings who have—it would be better to keep away, to give them up, if——"

"If what?"

"Should that hateful conjunction 'IF' be in a philosopher's dictionary?" he said. "No, I'll none of it. IF is the child of Hope, and Hope is a quicksand that has swallowed up many an unfortunate! Woodleigh, I have not the heart to advise you. You have made up your mind?"

"Yes, Sir."

"There is spirit, if not discretion, in your decision. Let us say no more concerning it."

Mr. Markingham rang the bell for the breakfast-service to be cleared away; and, taking the signal as a hint for dismissal, I went to my room, and to the companionship of my own unpleasant thoughts. Had I met Upton Woodleigh or my uncle that day, it is possible that my resolution to resign my clerkship might have been shaken, for I was sure in my heart that both my uncle and my cousins were interested in my fortunes. But Cousin Upton came not to see me, although the days went by, the holidays passed, the office time came round, and I went not to the business, but stayed at home, or read the newspaper advertisements, or started after situations that I never got.

The summer was growing old, and my quarter's salary was becoming low, when, on a certain day in August, 1845, Mrs. Bants came to my room, with the startling information that a young lady desired to see me.

"Is she waiting below?"

Mrs. Bants responded in the affirmative.

"Show her up, if you please—Mr. Markingham's room."

Whilst Mrs. Bants was descending the stairs, I crossed the landing to the room of my philosophical friend.

"My dear Mr. Markingham," said I, entering without any ceremony, "I believe one of my cousins has called to see me. I have taken advantage of an old kind offer of yours, and asked her to be shown into this room—you will excuse me?"

Mr. Markingham nodded, gathered up his papers from the table—the old parchments and yellow letters, the study of which had made him look as old as they—and walked towards the door.

He paused on the threshold and said:—

"Don't change your mind, Woodleigh. Let them go their own way, and we — *you*," he corrected, "go yours. It will be better for you than the patronage of these upstart relatives!"

He went out of the room, and as suddenly returned.

"Woodleigh, lad," he said, in a very excited manner for a philosopher, "don't be ruled by me. I'm a fool, a dreamer, and likely to ruin you with the worst advice. Act for yourself, Robert; I wouldn't have you throw away a chance of an honest living, God forbid!"

And leaving me to reflect on his extraordinary demeanour, he withdrew once more.

Presently came a light tap at the door, followed by the appearance of Mrs. Bants.

"The young lady who wished to see you, Mr. Woodleigh."

And with a knowing look on her red countenance, she stood aside to allow ingress to a lady—a thin, pale-faced young lady, with large grey eyes.

"Miss Bowden," I exclaimed, "this is an unexpected honour."

"As my business will not detain you long, Mr. Woodleigh," she replied, "I trust you will pardon the liberty that I have taken."

"No apology is requisite, Miss Bowden, I assure you."

Miss Bowden bowed in a stately manner, and then looked at Mrs. Bants, who, awed by the quiet stare of my visitor, backed out of the room, closed the door, and knelt down outside with her ear to the keyhole, until a loud knocking at the

street door—to be hereafter accounted for—summoned her to lower regions.

“You are surprised to see me, Mr. Woodleigh?”

“I certainly did not anticipate the pleasure of meeting you this morning.”

“You have become quite a courtier *since* our last meeting.”

“Since—ah! true, I did not act the courtier at the pic-nic,”

I replied; “but will you not be seated?”

“No,” she answered shortly; “I do not intend a long interview, and perhaps to desire a short one is hardly feminine. But you are a young man—quite a boy in fact—and I am some years your senior, and your relation by marriage too! There is nothing for people to talk about in this visit.”

“Certainly not.”

“People will talk,” she muttered, “and the world is full of evil speaking, lying, and slandering. Mr. Woodleigh,” she said abruptly, “I have come to ask whether it be your intention to absent yourself from Grove House all your life?”

“It is probable.”

“You are above all explanation—apology. You do not seek the first, and are too proud to offer the last?”

“Yes, Miss Bowden.”

“Then I will wish you good-morning.”

“Stay, Miss Bowden,” I cried, “if those who sent you——”

“I have not been sent, Mr. Woodleigh,” she interrupted; “not one of your relations is aware of this visit.”

I looked surprised.

“Your friends are as proud as yourself,” she continued, “and do not consider it their place to make the first advances to a reconciliation.”

“I do not wish them.”

“You have acted like an ill-tempered child, and have but yourself to thank for marring your best prospects in life.”

“Well, then I am nobody’s enemy but my own.”

“And you will be your own all the days of your life, I verily believe.”

Miss Bowden was at the door.

“One moment, Miss Bowden,” I said. “I trust you will allow me to thank you for this kindness, for showing an interest in me which those more nearly allied have not deigned to exhibit. ‘Ill-tempered child’ as you think me, I appreciate the action, and shall not readily forget it.”

"Yours is a strange, stubborn nature, Robert Woodleigh—something like my own, perhaps," she added with a sigh.

"No, I will not believe that."

"A kind word from uncle, aunt, or cousins would have changed your determination and made the way before you smooth again—would it not?"

I hesitated in my reply, and she continued:—

"You are one ready enough to forgive or forget, and too proud or too obstinate to seek forgiveness. You will never be a happy man!"

"I believe that, Miss Bowden."

"Add to that proud, obstinate nature the sensitive feelings of a woman, and Robert Woodleigh's character stands forth."

"My character is not for everyone to read."

"It is a character there is no disguising," she replied; "but at your age it is susceptible of change. Take the advice of one older than yourself—be less impulsive, and look more before you leap. Study, read, reflect; look in the lives of great men for a model to be copied."

"The world will teach me the truest lessons, Miss Bowden."

"And the hardest."

"Still I will consider your advice."

"Had you but taken it on the morning of the pic-nic, you would not have thrown away your every chance thus recklessly."

"My uncle—my own father's brother," I raved, "took the part of those who had insulted me—dismissed me harshly from his service—humiliated me before his grand acquaintances. He took every chance from me; I did not cast one away myself."

"I was not speaking of your business chances. My advice that day had nothing to do with account-books and office-hours. I knew that it would be better for you,—for you alone,—to withdraw from the party, and save yourself unnecessary pain."

I evaded her glance, I felt my face crimsoning beneath her gaze. Here was one who knew my secret, who saw into my aching dreamy heart and stung me with her pity. Had she suffered like myself once, and had her powers of perception, through long suffering, become peternaturally acute?

Looking at the carpet, I asked in a low tone if Miss Bowden had any more advice to give me.

"It will not be followed," she replied; "and yet I came to offer it. One of the family circle, as it were, of the Woodleighs, I have opportunities of seeing that your relations are hurt by your silence, and that the longer that silence endures the more you awaken their pride and strengthen your own wilfulness."

"You wish me to confess myself in the wrong, to beg their pardon on my knees, to ask my uncle to take me for his clerk again? To seek out Heberdeen, and play the penitent, of course?"

"No," Mr. Woodleigh, she replied, "I would not advise you to seek Mr. Heberdeen, or even visit Paddington again."

"Then how——"

"Let me finish. I would suggest that you write an apology to your uncle; that you accept the old post, which I believe he will offer you again—Upton, I am sure, will see to that—and then keep to your position, and think more of business than of Grove House, Paddington."

"To keep my position," I answered, moodily, "to slave at figures, and be treated like a slave. To put up with Cousin Upton's patronage and Richard Woodleigh's insults."

"Richard Woodleigh is not one to insult anybody," she answered, sharply.

Miss Bowden turned pale—her grave airs of counsel were disturbed, and she regarded me in a far less amiable manner.

"Had Richard Woodleigh said one word of remonstrance to Mr. Heberdeen, it would have been a friendly action; but by his silence he encouraged him to insult me."

"Good-morning, Mr. Woodleigh."

As she turned, for the third time, towards the door, it opened and a gentleman hastily entered the room—one at whose sudden, unexpected presence I fell back a step or two, whilst Miss Bowden dropped into a chair and drew her veil down hastily. So long since he and I had met, and so much longer since he and she—father and daughter—had looked into each other's face or interchanged a word! So strange a meeting after partings that had been with all of us so bitter, and the memory of which was stinging even then!

He stood there, on the threshold of Mr. Markingham's room, the same Mr. Bowden whom I had let into my mother's house at Nettleton one moonlight night four years ago; the

same indifferently-fitting clothes, the shabby kid gloves, the baggy umbrella, the rusty hat on the back of the head, all were unchanged—even the expression on his face was not a new one, that half-frowning, half-perplexed look I had seen more than once in life before I ran away from home.

“Robert,” he said to me, by way of greeting, and then, turning to his daughter, he said more huskily, “Amelia !”

“Mr. Bowden,” I stammered, and my lady visitor made a slight movement with her head, but did not trust herself with a reply.

Mr. Bowden removed his hat, drew off his gloves, placed hat, gloves, and umbrella on the table, pressed his hand over his high bumpy forehead, looked from me to Miss Bowden again, drew a long breath, and said :

“I did not expect to meet you both here ; it is very strange, and I shall be glad—in a minute or two when I have recovered my surprise—of a little explanation. I have come, Robert, at the request of your mother, who thinks it is time that we understood each other better. You bear no malice now ?”

“No, Mr. Bowden.”

“I am glad to hear it, very glad ; and Mely,”—how his voice changed, and how full of earnestness it was !—“may I hear the same from you, daughter ?”

“I have never borne you malice, father.”

“Why take that erring step then ?”

“Not erring,” was the short reply.

“Have you been happier away from me ?” he asked eagerly.

“You have been happier—I knew you would !”

“I have not !” he cried, with his characteristic vehemence. “Oh ! Mely, what doubts and fears and horrors might have been spared me, had you kept a daughter’s place !”

“Father, do you know what has been spared you by my absence ? Reproaches, mutual accusations, misconstructions, quarrels—everything that tends to separate the parent from the child. You have been spared all this by our disunion.”

“Perverse as ever,” he answered. He moved a step nearer, and said in a low tone :—

“Will you come back now and share my home, and let me be a father to you once again ?”

She made a gesture of dissent.

“May I ask another question ?”

“Why ask it ?” she answered gloomily.

"Because——"

"Because you doubt me," she interrupted sharply; "because that same distrust of all my motives peers out to wound me as of old. It is your nature, father, to distrust!"

"It is your nature, child, to misjudge me, to ascribe to me the meanest actions, to give me credit for not one good motive," said he, mournfully.

He drew a chair to the table, sat down, and leaned his head upon his hands. There was a long, painful silence, which Miss Bowden was the first to disturb by rising and leaning over him she had deserted.

"Father, I have kept my word! I have given up all ambitious thoughts of rising in the world. I am a governess in the family of the Woodleighs—this young man's relations—and am working for my living. Those whom I serve are kind to me, and, if I am not happy, still I am content."

"Well, well, content is everything," he answered. "You will never be a happy woman!"

"I know it."

Strange coincidence! Miss Bowden had said in the same room on that very morning that I should never be a happy man, and the father, a judge of human nature, was prophesying that no happiness awaited his daughter in the future.

He raised one large hand, and laid it on the small one which rested on his shoulder. It was so long since she had felt that loving touch; it was so fond an action for one so stern and cold, that she started, crimsoned, and turned away her head.

"Mely, let the past die, and let the new life of both atone for all."

"It cannot, father—it is impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible that is prosecuted earnestly, and with faith in Him who gives strength to the weakest."

"Were it alone the consideration of *my* happiness, I would not hesitate one moment. I can say that *now*."

"And yet you will leave me again?"

"Father, you were never happy with me—I crossed your every wish, I could not offer you obedience I filled your mind with care. My pursuits were not yours—you thought mine worldly, frivolous and wicked, and you crossed them—*crushed* them!"

"For your good?"

"You are no more than man, and man is not infallible," she

cried; "you acted wisely in your own conceit, but it was *not* for my good. It left me in the world without a purpose; it hardened me, and yet it made me sensitive and jealous. You have not forgotten our night of separation?"

"Why speak of it now?" with a glance in my direction.

"*He* strengthened me in my purpose when my heart was giving way," she answered, pointing to me; "he crossed my path when I was desolate, perplexed, and other troubles were beating at my heart; when," she added, after a moment's hesitation, "I thought of coming to you for counsel and assistance. His story proved no nature like my own could live with you, for you have outlived youth, and forgotten its hopes, ambitions and pursuits. I left home and made no sign—*he* did the same."

"He was in the wrong," he muttered; "but how much in the wrong were you, a woman!"

"I left to make you happy," she answered. "I did not love you less, but I knew well my stubborn temper would but make you wretched. Every day was widening the breach between us, and I felt that I should respect and love you more if we were separated. I was just of age, my own mistress, and I went into the world a thoughtful woman. I think that I acted for the best."

"No, no."

"And I am acting for the best now, in leaving you to the new home you have made, and to the new wife you have chosen," she continued, "for it would not enhance your happiness to have me at your fireside. Oh! father, you are happier away from me, your wilful, jealous, disobedient child!"

And she, usually so firm and obdurate, gave way at last, and wept on his shoulder with all a woman's passionate abandonment. Mr. Bowden was the father then; he put his arms round her and drew her to his breast; he raised her veil and kissed her; he bent his head over her and shaded his eyes with a hand that trembled very much.

It was but a momentary weakness; she sprang from his embrace, and moved towards the door.

"Let me go now, or I may promise more than I can perform, and rue it in my sterner moments."

"Mely, don't leave me yet!"

"Yes, yes, it is better," she murmured; "now that we have seen each other, let me go. We shall meet again, soon

perhaps—not too soon, for both our sakes—but still our parting is not for ever, now ! ”

“ You spoke of counsel—of assistance.”

She coloured, and the quick hand drew down the veil again.

“ The time is past—for good or for evil, it is too late now—good-bye ! ”

She darted from the room and closed the door behind her. Mr. Bowden made two hasty strides towards the door, stopped, then slowly returned.

“ It will but agitate her more,” he said ; “ there is no moving her resolves. Poor girl, how very like her mother ! ”

He resumed the seat he had quitted, and leaned his head upon his hands after the old manner. There was another long pause, longer than before, for Mr. Bowden took time to recover himself, and the meeting with his daughter had not lightly disturbed him.

“ This has been a strange meeting,” he said at last ; “ and brought about more strangely still. How long have you known my daughter, Robert ? ”

I told him.

“ And yet you could not write a line and relieve me from a great anxiety ? ”

“ It was her wish ; she said it could do no good to either her or you.”

“ Has it not done good ? ” he asked ; “ has it not still assured me of her affection, of her health, her safety ? Yes ; it has been a painful meeting, but we shall be both the better for it—think of each other the better for it, God be praised ! ”

To my surprise he rose, put his hat on the back of his head, and seized his gloves and umbrella.

“ You are not going, Mr. Bowden ? ”

“ Yes, yes, Robert,” he said, “ I am too much disturbed to prolong this interview to a greater length. I will call to-morrow, and have a long talk to you about your prospects—about mine. I am in London in the place of an old friend of ours—Mr. Parnell again—you remember him ? Poor dear man, he is very ill, I fear.”

“ And my mother—she is well, I hope ? ”

“ Very well, thank you, Mely—Robert, I mean,” he said. “ She sends her best love, and hopes to see you in your holidays.”

“ Oh ! my holidays—yes.”

"I'll look in to-morrow morning. Robert, you are sure that you don't bear me malice now?"

"Quite sure, Sir," said I, extending my hand.

He wrung it so heartily in his, he looked at me so kindly, that I could not believe it was the same Mr. Bowden whom I had hated and been beaten by, and had run away from in the days of old.

"Perhaps I was too hasty," he said, taking his hat off again, and brushing his hair vigorously; "might have talked to you a little before, before—ahem—but you certainly deserved a flogging; it was very wrong of you to—well, it belongs to the past. Good-morning. Oh! I had nearly forgotten them, and they have been weighing down my pocket for the last twelve hours, too."

"What are they, Sir?"

"Some Grooks' pills, from your dear mother," said he, laying a heavy parcel on the table; "she thought that you might be out of them."

"I have a box by me now, Mr. Bowden."

"They are very good things, Robert."

"Not a doubt of it, Sir."

"Your mother hopes that you won't neglect them."

"All right, Sir; I'll take every care of them."

"And I'll call to-morrow, when I'm less disturbed, and we'll have a long talk together. Bless my soul, what a great fellow you have grown, to be sure, Robert; I don't think that I should have known you if I had met you in the street—and to find you here with my child, too. I might have been knocked down by a feather when the landlady told me you were up stairs with a Miss Bowden. I have been bewildered ever since. I must go home and think it over. Good-morning."

Mr. Bowden hurried out of the room and went clattering down stairs in a pair of boots heavy enough for a Nettleton ploughboy. When the street door closed, I looked through the window and saw him striding at a rapid pace down Barker Street, his umbrella and gloves in one hand, his hat in the other, and everybody looking after him.

CHAPTER XII.

CHANGES.

AFTER Mr. Bowden had gone, and I was left alone to reflect on the incidents of the morning, I became conscious of a feeling of bewilderment myself. It had all happened very suddenly; first Miss Bowden, then Miss Bowden's father, then a strange and stormy meeting, a war of words, a shower of reproaches, love and anger blended together confusedly, tears, solicitations, protestations, and upbraidings; references to a mysterious disappointment in early life, allusions to something that had recently transpired, and which required counsel and assistance—taking all this together, it was no wonder that I sat and stared at Grook's pills on the table after my step-father had left me, and wondered what the events of the last hour indicated, and whether any part of them was from the land of dreams.

When Mr. Markingham entered, he was more curious to know what had occurred during the recent interview than his philosophy warranted. I told him of the advice offered me by Miss Bowden, casually alluded to the call of my step-father, but of course entered into no relation of the painful interview between father and child to which I had been a witness. Mr. Markingham merely remarked on conclusion :—

“And you mean to take her advice?”

“No.”

“You give up your uncle, cousins—*that* cousin, too?”

“They have given *me* up. Didn't you say so?”

“True, I said so.”

And Mr. Markingham, more thoughtful than usual, lit his pipe, took up his hat, and followed the example of Mr. Bowden by retiring into Barker Street.

The next day Mr. Bowden kept his promise by calling on me at an early hour. I had to introduce my step-father to the philosopher, and it was curious to see them bow and look sharply at each other from under their brows. There was a coldness between them in the very first moment of meeting, as though each saw in the other one totally opposed to him in thoughts, studies, and pursuits. Perhaps Mr. Bowden looked on the philosopher as the man I had selected for a friend and

counsellor in preference to himself, and that accounted for the iced good-morning which at last escaped him.

"Good-morning," responded Mr. Markingham; "this is an unexpected pleasure. Take a chair, Sir. You smoke, I presume?"

"No, Sir, I do *not* smoke," replied Mr. Bowden. "I consider smoking a pernicious habit."

"We all have our pernicious habits, Mr. Bowden," replied the philosopher, taking down his meerschaum; "there is not one of us, a morbid thinker has observed, who has not a secret or a habit of which he is ashamed."

"The morbid thinker was wrong."

"I don't know that, Mr. Bowden," replied Markingham; "the world is full of strange mysteries and we take our parts therein. I have my secret, you have yours."

Mr. Bowden shook his head.

"I am ashamed of mine, at times," continued he, "and perhaps yours has brought the blush to the cheek more than once in life."

"I am a minister of the Gospel, Sir."

"And a minister should be all blushes; he is so artless, and free from guile; he is a spotless personage! He has no greater secret than a desire to shine and become popular; to walk into the shoes of the dead man who was higher than himself in office; to have a doting congregation to embroider him braces and slippers, and subscribe for altar-cloths and rustling silk surplices!"

Mr. Bowden, who had coloured at the first part of Mr. Markingham's speech, which seemed addressed to his pipe as he replenished it with his favourite birdseye, began to draw himself up and look sternly at the speaker.

When the philosopher had concluded his acrimonious remarks, Mr. Bowden said:—

"We Methodists think of higher objects than slippers, Sir, and we have grave objections to altar-cloths and surplices. By your satire, Sir—uncalled-for as it is—I presume that you are an enemy to both church and chapel?"

"To anything that savours of hypocrisy."

"'Tis the Atheist's excuse."

I could see Mr. Markingham's eyes brighten and his cheeks flush; he had forgotten the respect due to visitors, he had come face to face with a member of a class he especially disliked, and he seemed inclined to make the most of the opportunity.

As he was about to reply, I said hurriedly :—

“Mr. Markingham will excuse me, I hope, but I have promised Mr. Bowden an interview of some length, and my step-father’s time is more precious than my own.”

Mr. Markingham appeared to hesitate ; he was in one of his bad tempers, and did not care to suddenly desist, but the look which succeeded my words appeared to exercise an influence over him, for he bowed, and said :—

“Pray let me place my apartments at your service.”

“No, Sir,” cried Mr. Bowden ; “this young man will lead the way to his own room. I can advise him with more comfort there.”

“More advice,” said Mr. Markingham, with a comical look towards me ; “my dearly beloved Robert, you are the object of intense solicitude.”

Mr. Bowden being disinclined to remain in Mr. Markingham’s apartment, I led the way to my own room, and placed a chair near the window for my step-father.

“And is *that* the man with whom you have been living since you left Nettleton, Robert ? the same man your mother saw once and thought such a ‘gentleman ?’ ”

“The same, Mr. Bowden.”

“I am greatly disappointed.”

“He is not himself to-day, Sir,” said I ; “he has occasionally fits of acerbity which make a different man of him—he has been troubled very much of late, and has had, I believe, a great deal to contend with.”

“The good man shines the brighter in his hour of adversity, Robert,” he answered ; “you have made a strange choice between us.”

Mr. Bowden began a sermon, with a proper text and the requisite number of heads, concerning the danger of associating with infidels and unbelievers, and I heard it patiently to the end, and then commenced the story of my own troubles, and the way in which I had lost my uncle’s favour.

Mr. Bowden burst into sermon No. 2 at the conclusion of my tale.

“That hateful perverse temper of yours, Robert, it will be your bane through life ; it will always stand between you and your happiness. Try humility, Robert ; it is a great virtue. Go to your uncle and confess that you were in the wrong.”

“I have had that advice offered me before, Mr. Bowden, and

I have still the same reply to give. He will think that I have come back for my situation."

"But——"

"But I was not in the wrong either; that is, not wholly in the wrong. Heberdeen, as I have told you, was the cause of all."

"Heberdeen forgot he was the gentleman, perhaps, but you forgot that you were your uncle's servant, Robert."

"I was my uncle's guest that day," I cried, flying into my usual fit of passion; "why do you taunt me with my low position? I know it well enough, and have felt it lately deep enough!"

Mr. Bowden rubbed his temples, and looked hard at me.

"I don't see a great improvement in you, Robert. I fear that you have been too much your own master lately."

"I am never happy when I have a master over me," I said; "wasn't I miserable enough when you sought to instruct and restrain me?"

"I was about to make an offer, Robert, but that last taunt has stopped me," he said, sadly.

"I—I didn't mean it for a taunt, Sir—I hope that I haven't pained you?"

"Not much," he answered, with a grim smile; "I ought to be used to you by this time. I was about to offer a renewal of our intimacy, a home beneath the same roof again. I think my experience would now teach me the proper way to benefit you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Bowden, to seek to be again troubled with one so obstinate and wilful as myself; and I thank you heartily for the offer, but I should not be happy. I could not return to life in Nettleton for a kingdom; I must go my own way, and fight my own battles."

"You mistake, Robert. Your mother and I are coming to London."

"Indeed!"

"And you can live with us instead of with that man."

"He has been very kind to me; he is alone in the world, and is attached to me. I will not forsake him."

"You cling to the stranger and give up your best friends."

"Let us change the subject, Sir," I said. "You will like Mr. Markingham when you know him better—when you hear all that he has done for me, and see him as he really is. So you leave Nettleton, Mr. Bowden?"

"Yea," replied my step-father ; "the Great Giver has been pleased to make the last days of my life more smooth, and to bless me with a few more worldly goods. I have been appointed to succeed Mr. Parnell again ; my dear old friend, who is getting aged and infirm, reluctantly gives up the charge of his large flock and entrusts it to my care. In a pecuniary point of view it is better for me, but in a spiritual it is the end of my ambition ; I feel there is more good to be done, more of Satan's works to defy, and, please God, to overthrow, and my heart groweth strong within me for the task."

Mr. Bowden's eyes kindled, his chest heaved, and he looked a worthy servant of his Master. That was the reason for his flushed face when Mr. Markingham had spoken of a minister's desire to shine—it was my step-father's desire in his heart, but not for the name that might be given him by men, as the cynic had declared.

That morning I learned Mr. Bowden had been some weeks at his new post, and that my mother would join him in town when all things at Nettleton were satisfactorily arranged. I went the next Sunday to hear Mr. Bowden preach in a great chapel near St. Martin's Lane, and I felt that he had assumed his right position at last, and that his happiest, though his most arduous, time was coming. I found the chapel crowded, and people standing in the passages, and down the aisles, and sitting up the pulpit steps. I had not heard him for four years, and his voice seemed to have an accusing ring in it when he began the plain services of his sect. He had strangely altered and improved too ; his discourse was more eloquent and less turgid, and he read, or prayed, or preached with a solemn earnestness that struck home to many a heart that morning, and perhaps sowed the seed of many a reformation. As I went out of the chapel with the crowd, I came face to face with his daughter Amelia.

"Miss Bowden !" I exclaimed, "I did not expect to see you here."

"Hush !" she replied ; "there is no occasion to let the world know that I have come to hear him preach. How good and noble he looked in the pulpit ! I always felt that he would become a great man. Robert Woodleigh, you must not tell him I have been here."

"I think it would please him, Miss Bowden."

"It would give him hope of my returning to his side and beginning again the old life—the old life," she added, bitterly,

"of misunderstanding and sorrow! I can never make him happy, let me love him even as I feel I do this morning."

"Have you felt otherwise, Miss Bowden?"

"I hated him once—at least, I thought so—when he acted for *my good*, when we quarrelled, and he was the man, not the minister. But," suddenly changing the discourse, "you have not written to your uncle—have not heard from your friends at Paddington?"

"My friends!" I repeated ironically.

"Still wilful—still expectant that those aggrieved will make the first step to a reconciliation."

"They want no reconciliation from a servant," I said.

"To-day's sermon does not appear to have made a great impression on you, Mr. Woodleigh."

"Has it on Miss Bowden?"

"It has not made me less alive to rudeness, Sir."

And with a look that only Miss Bowden could bestow, she brushed past me and walked rapidly away.

"Certainly she is not the best of tempers," I thought as I looked after her; "quick and fiery as gunpowder. What a misery a bad temper must be to its possessor, to be sure!"

And, as if I was the most amiable individual under the sun, I went home to Barker Street, pitying poor Miss Bowden all the way.

I found Tom Arrow awaiting my return; Tom Arrow, gorgeously bedizened, and ready after dinner for a stroll in the parks. I had not seen him since the quarrel at Richmond, and he was astonished to hear that I had kept my word and, in asserting my outraged dignity, had lost a very good situation.

"And have you nothing else in view?"

"Nothing."

Tom Arrow whistled long and plaintively.

"You always were a rum fellow, and there was no understanding you. I say, you have no regard for my feelings in the matter."

"Your feelings—what's the matter with them, Tom?"

"My dear Bob, it's no laughing matter. I'm as serious as a man after a condemned sermon. Miss Woodleigh, the one with the ringlets, was a trifle too pretty for me, and I've lost my heart—it's clean gone."

"Rubbish!"

"It may be rubbish, but it's not a pleasant thing to lose

suddenly, Bob, it leaves such a vacuum ! Upon my word I'm not joking," he continued gravely ; "I would give everything I have in the world—that's my grandmother's money—to be engaged to her, to sit by her side looking into her violet eyes, hear her say——"

"Oh ! what a fool you are, Tom !" I said, pettishly ; "you forget about Miss Heberdeen and your spoony confessions at the 'Ship.'"

"Spoonny, indeed !" said Tom, looking at me indignantly ; "if that is the way you treat a burst of confidence, I'll never tell you anything again—see if I do."

And in less than half an hour he was talking of Cousin Constance again, and infuriating me by questions about her age and accomplishments.

Nevertheless, Tom Arrow was a good friend to me at that time ; his light spirits kept me from brooding too much on the many disappointments which I experienced in my search for employment, and his purse was always open to me, and always declined whilst a penny remained of my own.

The last penny went at last, however, and I was too proud to confess to Mr. Bowden or Mr. Markingham that it had gone. The former would have helped me readily, but there would have been a sermon included, and the latter had the will without the power ; so I, blushing like a girl, borrowed ten pounds of Tom Arrow, who wanted to make it twenty on the instant.

"It will save you asking twice, old boy," put in Tom delicately ; "don't you know it'll last double as long, and something will turn up by that time and make everything straight again."

Mr. Markingham was anxious about my money also ; for, two days after Tom Arrow's ten pounds were in my pocket, he made inquiry concerning my resources. He was very pale that day, and there was a wild look about his eyes.

I told him of the debt that I had incurred.

"You could not come to me ?" he said sharply.

"I feared that a loan would inconvenience you, Sir, and Mr. Arrow was very pressing."

"He's a soft-hearted as well as a soft-headed fellow, Woodleigh. There are many worse people in the world than young Arrow."

"Glad that you are beginning to entertain a better opinion of him, Sir."

"I always had a very good opinion of him."

"'Good-tempered fool' to wit."

"Why, Woodleigh, what a tenacious memory you have," he said with a laugh; "what a good hater you would make, were there fitting occasion for it. But 'good-tempered fool' is not so very depreciatory, especially as few persons can agree what a fool is—he is as hard to define as a 'gentleman.'"

"Is he?"

"I dare say many men would think you as big a fool as ever was born, Woodleigh—you have certainly acted like one, once or twice."

"Have you never done the same, Sir?" I asked quietly.

"Oh! we all have our foolish actions to answer for and to weep over," said Mr. Markingham, in reply, "and I am no exception to the rule. Perhaps Mr. Bowden is, eh?"

"You don't like him, Sir."

"I hate parsons, wise as they are."

"I think he did a foolish thing, Sir, a few days since."

"What was it?"

"He offered me his home again—spoke of his prospects and his chances of improving mine; was anxious to be again my father and take fresh troubles to his breast."

"And you?" asked Markingham, eagerly; "you declined?"

"Yes."

"You preferred the crabbed old fellow of forty-three; the friendless man who has stung you with his bitterness, and teased you with his false philosophy so often."

"I told him that I would not forsake you, for I thought——"

"What?—go on."

"That you had, perhaps, a little liking for me, despite all our altercations. I hope I was right in saying that, Sir."

"Ahem!—perhaps."

I fancied he began to whistle in rather a forced manner, as he crossed the room for that everlasting meerschaum.

"Have you made your choice for good, Woodleigh?"

"Yes, Sir, I cannot resign my freedom."

"And you really call living with Stephen Markingham 'freedom'?" he asked; "well, you are a strange lad, and perhaps people would call us a strange couple. Woodleigh," he cried, with a vehemence that made me start; "I do like you, *there*, and if it will do you any good to hear it, you are the second one of my own sex whom I have ever liked in my life. I took a fancy to you on the high-road, and, when

I knew you better, I thought that if you were only my son, what a hold to life you would give me — if you were only my younger brother, what a claim on old feelings that were drying up in my heart. I suppose man must have something to regard with affection—it is a law of nature, and I was too vain to think that I could wrap myself in my egotism, and say, ‘Friends, I have outlived you!’ When you crossed my path and took an interest in me, it was a flattery to which years had made me a stranger; and when I was ill once—the first year—and you were anxious, it was pleasant to feel that there was some one who wished me better, and some one who missed me! And now, boy, I can repay you,” he said exultingly; “the tide turned to-day, and the Markingham star glitters forth from the darkness! Now let me turn to my one friend and say, be my son or my brother—in adversity we have stood side by side, let us share the bright days together, now the fierce waves recede and leave us safe on the rock.”

He clasped my hands in his, which were nervous and trembling, and added:—

“Wish me joy, Woodleigh—I have come through the battle of law a conqueror. *Rich*, boy, *RICH*!”

He forgot his philosophy, as he had recently forgot his reserve—he wrung my hands in his, he laughed, he cried, he wrung my hands again, he even clasped me to his breast.

“We were talking of acting the fool a moment since,” said he, at last; “does not the possession of a little money make the greatest fool of all, Woodleigh!”

B O O K V.

A B E T T E R P O S I T I O N

“ Why do we set our whole intents
On riches, dignity, and rents ? ”

SIR DAVID LINDSAY.

“ Do you insinuate, Sir, that I want common sense ? ”

“ No, Sir, no—I do not mean that ye *want* it ; but that it
would na do ye mickle harm gin ye had it. It would be a
vary pretty addition to your aither accomplishments.”

BAGE.

CHAPTER I

PROSPECTS.

Is there a being on the earth's surface—a rational and reflecting being—who has less idea of *our* time and its value than a lawyer? I believe not. Weeks and months are nothing to him, who sits at his desk unmoved by the entreaties of clients, to whom each revolution of this world of money-spinners is twenty-four hours less of life. "This day week" and "This day month" are catch-words to console the lingerers in the ante-room, and the week and the month drag their slow length along, and progress is only made in the costs!

But this is an old complaint. Hundreds of years ago Shakspeare mourned over the "law's delay" and the "insolence of office," and law is yet a fashionable amusement, and office insolence still flourishes. Stephen Markingham had to bide his time with many men made sadder and wiser by experience; he was on the sunny side of the land, and what cause had he to complain? The engines of the law worked a little faster for him, but there were seals to affix, signatures to obtain, the pleasure of fee-swollen counsel to wait, and autumn and winter sped by, and two months of 1846 passed before Markingham was himself again.

Early in March law let him free from its clutches, and he exchanged No. 2, Barker Street, and the "Markingham grand," for a mansion at Knightsbridge, where there was no Mrs. Bants to perplex his philosophy. He had a country house too, but that was already in the hands of his solicitor for disposal, and the house of the Heberdeens at Nettleton was advertised "For sale, with immediate possession."

A man seldom rises suddenly to affluence without some unfortunate individual suffering for it, and with the reign of Markingham had occurred the dethronement of Squire Heberdeen. The history of the lawsuit between those personages is a complex one, and I fear its relation would occupy too many chapters, and, what is a case of more moment, would not interest the reader much. Will the indulgent reader take my word for it that Stephen Markingham came into his property legally and fairly,

without requiring a proof positive in the next hundred pages ? Shall I go on with my own story, or diverge to the great lawsuit ? Shall the follies of love or the subtleties of law take the lead ? Ah ! I know what the ladies will say, and to the ladies' decision we always bow humbly, and place our hand on our heart !

Suffice it to say, then, that the fathers of Mr. Markingham and the late Mrs. Heberdeen were brothers—that each had a share in the property at Nettleton, and some rows of houses in town ; that Mrs. Heberdeen's father's share extended only to the lifetime of his daughter, and that the late Mr. Markingham's portion was mortgaged to Squire Heberdeen's elder brother (since defunct) and was finally confiscated in an illegal manner. Add to this the confusion of leases and transfers of property, and a strange conglomeration ensues, which was quite enough for the lawyers to sift through, without troubling the brain of Robert Woodleigh.

By this change my prospects had vastly improved, although it was not without a struggle that I became indebted to the stranger's bounty. Still, Markingham had been so long my friend, was really so attached to me, had exhibited in the first days of his prosperity that attachment so clearly, that it was a greater pleasure for him to make a gentleman of me than it was to the writer of these pages to become one.

"I do no man an injustice in my choice of a son," argued Markingham ; "I have no friend in the world whom I rob by adopting you. We two have shared the hardships of life for four years together, have fallen into each other's ways, and become accustomed to each other's peculiarities ; why should I leave you in the shade because the sun smiles on me, when there is sunshine enough for us both ? "

When I still hesitated, he plied me with fresh arguments that turned the scale completely.

"I do not wish to buy your independence, Woodleigh ; to make you a slave subservient to my whims for a few hundreds a-year. Say I raise you for a time to an altitude whence you can look more around you, and see what life suits you best. Be it a profession or business, the bar or the merchant's counting-house, partnership even with your uncle, why, I may afford to advance you the money necessary, having confidence in your industry to repay me in good time. Pleasure, business, or marriage, tell me when the hour comes and trust to me to help you."

Marriage ! I drew my breath and paused. What a glorious

vista from the hill-top lay before me as he spoke, what dazzling temptations rose up to entice me ! Marriage, partnership with my uncle, *that cousin* again—that home all to ourselves, that great chance in life for me—oh ! yes, I would live with Mr Markingham ; I would take him into my confidence.

And before I made my choice, with that impulsiveness which was part of my nature, I told my silly love story to the man whom love had in part helped to harden.

“ You thinking of a home and a wife at eighteen years or age ! ” he said, laying his hand on my shoulder. “ Boy, this is romance.”

“ No, Sir.”

“ The reality will never come from its depths, I am sure of it.”

“ I do not wish to be married to her yet—that is, I cannot expect it. But to be engaged to her, to feel sure that no one else can step before me and snatch her away ! ”

“ Well, try your fortune when the opportunity is ripe, young Corydon,” said Markingham, “ and if papa Woodleigh should ask you for your prospects in life, refer him to me.”

“ Oh, Sir, what have I done to deserve this kindness ? ”

He did not answer. He turned away from me, and looked intently from the window of his splendid drawing-room into the street. Did my nature, and the vagueness of my day-dreams, still remind him of his own ?

No more was said on the subject nearest my heart ; I made my choice, and became the *protégé* of Stephen Markingham.

Mr. Bowden had a great deal to say concerning that choice to me ; and my mother, who was in London for good, cried over it one moment, and congratulated me the next.

“ I don’t think that you are the young man, Robert, to become suddenly independent and not feel the worse for it,” affirmed Mr. Bowden. “ You have been too headstrong all your life, for your virtues to shine forth very conspicuously now your own will is law. Besides ——”

He hesitated.

“ Go on, Sir,” said I ; “ you were about to mention Mr. Markingham.”

“ Yes ; shall I offend you, Robert ? ”

“ No, Sir.”

“ Besides, your guardian and protector is not one to set you the best example in life,” he continued ; “ he may be a learned, even a good man, but he is not fit to be the ruling hand of Robert Woodleigh.”

"You must remember, Mr. Bowden, that you have seen him once."

"Well, well, perhaps I may change my opinion when I see more of him," was the reply; "at present it is not a favourable one."

Mr. Bowden did change his opinion to a certain extent when the course of events brought him in contact with the philosopher. Comfortable circumstances make a great change in the character of an individual, and Mr. Markingham of Knightsbridge was a different person to the lodger at No. 2, Barker Street. The present Mr. Markingham was a well-bred, affable personage; nothing disconcerted him; and when he was satirical, which was seldom the case now, he seemed afraid of wounding too deeply the susceptibilities of those with whom he jested. There was a graceful ease in all his actions, too, which indicated the true gentleman. He had entered his proper sphere at last, and I could judge by his manner how keenly he must have felt the low estate of his past. I knew afterwards that his life had been one struggle beneath the philosopher's mask; that when he was railing against appearances and defying them, he was inwardly shrinking with shame, fearing every one who brushed by him in the street might be one whom he had known in better days; that he was feeling his low position most acutely when he was expatiating on the comforts of it and mocking at the fortunate.

Now his struggles were over, his true nature displayed itself and made a new being of him. There was no further counting of money and allotting a portion for each week's expenses; he drew liberally on his bankers and lived in good style. Now his weakness was a love of display and a lavish expenditure. He seemed endeavouring to make up for lost time, and to drown in something which was very like extravagance the remembrance of Barker Street and the two-pair front wherein he had so long sustained a false character.

The meeting between Mr. Bowden and Mr. Markingham passed off as satisfactorily as could have been anticipated—the natures of those gentlemen were too distinct and opposite not to jar unpleasantly at times; but still, there were none of Mr. Markingham's sneers at my step-father's profession, at his increasing popularity as a preacher, at the rough, but honest, expression of his feelings, and Mr. Bowden, though he still doubted if Mr. Markingham were the best adviser and protector for me—even told him so—did not aggravate matters by seeking to turn my

resolution, but trusted to his closer intimacy with me to exercise the power of warning and advising.

Thus a few weeks went by, during which I was mustering courage to call at Grove House, Paddington. I could apologise for past behaviour, now no false construction could be put on my visits, and begin life again in the midst of my relations, with hope in the future of the sunny-faced cousin. Yet, Constance Woodleigh had never exhibited one glimmer of affection for me, had once seemed to guess at my secret, and become more reserved in consequence. "Yet, might not that have been owing to the futility of fostering hopes which could never, in the common course of events, be realised?" whispered hope to the dreamer. Then, there was young Heberdeen—he had appeared interested in her; but Heberdeen's day was over, and I might reign in his stead. Yes, I would go and see my relations at the first opportunity, when I had become accustomed to my new position in society. And it was astonishing how soon I began to think myself the gentleman, to have fine tastes and perceptions, to feel myself at home in the grand mansion, and to order the liveried menials about. There had always been a certain amount of energy in my character, but my change in life appeared to alter even that. I felt myself becoming indolent. I calmly let things take their course, for or against me. If I formed a plan, and anything happened to cross it, I no longer fired up with opposition and set my mind more strongly on succeeding; I gave way, or turned to something else. Unknown even to myself, I was beginning to copy Mr. Markingham.

Certainly an independent position in life was not the finest thing in the world for me, though I took so readily to it. Mr. Bowden did not shake his head for nothing when I talked of my new home, of the servants we kept, and of the carriage and pair we rode out in.

One day that carriage and pair, by the orders of Mr. Markingham, stopped before a house in Great Coram Street.

"Who lives here, Sir?"

"One whom I have not seen for many years, Woodleigh," said Markingham; "one who has seen better days."

He who had seen better days sent down his compliments by the servant, and regretted that he was too busy to receive company that morning. As we rode away again Markingham said:—

"Perhaps he is right. I would not have seen him in my

hermitage at Chelsea, though he had come with the best of motives. It is easy for me to play the patron, but hard for him to admire the performance."

The carriage stopped at the house again on the same day of the next week, and Mr. Markingham once more sent up his card, writing this time a few words in pencil underneath his name.

The servant returned and said that Mr. Heberdeen would see Mr. Markingham. When my patron made a sign for me to leave the carriage I hesitated to accompany him.

"Come, Woodleigh," he said with an odd twinkle in his eye, "I wish you to be the witness to an offer I am about to make Squire Heberdeen, "so that, if you hear the world say I treated my adversary badly, you can deny it *in toto*. I dare say we shall find the Squire bears his change bravely enough; his fall is not to the lowest depths—mine was."

The servant ushered us to the front room on the first floor, a well furnished drawing-room, in which were Squire Heberdeen, his son and daughter. Squire Heberdeen had greatly changed since I had seen him last; his face had lost much of its colour, and his hair was streaked with grey. My appearance seemed to surprise him, and he looked towards Mr. Markingham for an explanation.

"My friend, Mr. Woodleigh," explained Mr. Markingham; "he was desirous of accompanying me, to tender an apology, I believe, to your son here."

I stared aghast at Markingham, then looked at young Heberdeen, whose face flushed as red as my own.

"Oh! no apology is necessary," he replied; "it was a foolish affair, and we were both to blame."

This was a frank confession for one usually so proud, and I looked at him again. The flush had left his cheek then, and, in contrast to his black hair and eyes, his face seemed very white. He had never looked two years my senior before, although that was the difference of age between us; but on that day, with that grave expression on his features, he appeared to have become a thoughtful man. Had eight months changed him? or had the trials through which he had passed altered even the very expression of his countenance?

"Be seated, Mr. Markingham," said the *ci-devant* Squire; "Ned," to his son, "offer a chair to Mr. Woodleigh."

But Mr. Markingham had advanced to Squire Heberdeen—I cannot refrain from calling him by his old familiar name—

and extended his hand. It was the Squire's turn to colour, although he imitated his example, and met his late adversary's hand half way. It did not seem a very hearty greeting for all that show of friendship, I thought, as I bowed to Miss Heberdeen.

"Your daughter?" asked Markingham, turning quickly to the lady.

"Yes, Sir."

"The only one?"

Squire Heberdeen nodded an assent.

Markingham offered his hand in that direction also, and Miss Heberdeen, with some little embarrassment, placed hers within it.

Mr. Markingham looked at her so long and earnestly that she blushed and evaded his gaze.

"You are very like one I knew some years ago, Miss Heberdeen," said he; "you bring the past before me vividly."

He released her hand and sat down with a half sigh. Miss Heberdeen made a movement to withdraw.

"Don't go, Miss Heberdeen," said Markingham, who detected the movement; "we have no state secrets to discuss with your father; this is merely a little visit of ceremony which I thought it my duty to pay. It is not in human nature for Squire Heberdeen to regard me kindly at present; the wound is recent, and there are painful reminiscences for both of us to dwell upon. Your stay will soften that pain, I feel assured."

Miss Heberdeen smiled faintly and resumed her seat.

"Heberdeen, do you know that it is twenty-two years—twenty-two years almost to the very day—since we shook hands last?"

"So long as that?" murmured the Squire.

"You remember the occasion?"

"Well."

"I wished you joy on your marriage with my Cousin Harriet, wished you all prosperity in life. You have experienced sorrow since that day, old schoolfellow, as well as joy."

"It is the lot of man."

"Still, for two and twenty years you have not had poverty to contend with. I have. Your lot has been happier than mine, for all man's natural share of sorrow. You made a happy marriage, and had children to gladden your home;

surely twenty-two years of prosperity are something to be grateful for."

"Why this homily, Markingham?" asked the Squire, with surprise.

"To show that the loss you have recently sustained should teach you resignation."

"He who has gained by our loss is not the most fitting preacher," cried young Heberdeen with some vehemence.

"Patience, Ned," said the Squire, holding up his hand; "you forget Mr. Markingham has been a friend of mine."

"You forget, too, young Heberdeen," added Mr. Markingham, "that I have only gained my rights by your losses, and that I stand here to offer you a friend's assistance."

Young Heberdeen's eyes flashed, and his chest heaved beneath the reproof. He was about to answer, when he caught his father's glance again, and stopped.

"My son," said Squire Heberdeen, with a proud look in his direction, "is rather hot-headed; it is his greatest fault, and I trust to time and his own strong will to curb it. Adversity has already taught him that there are other firm wills in the world besides his own, and has brought him out of the furnace of affliction more man-like. We shall bear our troubles well, Markingham," he said, with a bright smile, "for we have faith in one another, and have been drawn closer to one another since your rise in life."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Markingham.

"We are not wholly shipwrecked," continued the Squire, his face beginning to assume its characteristic frankness of expression; "we have still something to cling to, though the ship has gone to the bottom with three-fourths of our fortune. Men cunning in the law tell me that I have still a claim to your property, and would buoy me up with false hopes—*i. e.* fresh costs and new trials. But I have followed the shadows too long, and you have won the game, Markingham."

"It is not to exult in that victory that I have come hither to-day—you don't think that?"

"No, but I am still at a loss——"

"Let me explain, then," said Markingham, "and put an end to an interview which has already exceeded the limits of a morning call. Let me ask if it be still your intention to keep your son at college?"

"It is not in my power."

"Will you leave that to my care? Will you allow me to

provide for his college education until he has attained his degrees and is prepared to enter his profession?"

"That is a question for me to answer, Mr. Markingham," broke in here the deep voice of his son.

Mr. Markingham turned to young Heberdeen, expectant of his reply.

"It was my mother's wish," he began, "that I should be brought up for the Church."

"I thought so," muttered Markingham.

"In her last illness," he continued, his voice becoming still deeper, "I believe she hesitated for the first time, and I can guess now her reasons and her doubts."

"Well, Sir."

"Well, I can console myself for my losses by thinking that college was not the best place for me, and the Church not the most fitting profession. Collegians are extravagant acquaintances, and it is only a cap and gown here and there that sets a good example. I have fallen."

"But——"

"Your pardon, Sir," said young Heberdeen quickly, "if I anticipate your answer, and thank you for it; it is a kind offer, but I fear that you do not understand the Heberdeens."

"Yes, Sir, I do," replied Markingham.

"Then, do you not understand me," said the Squire's son, holding up his head proudly, "or you would not offer me your charity. My rise in life, Sir, shall be by my own efforts; I will take the steepest way and fall, rather than the easy path and the hand of the stranger."

I winced. Was this Ned Heberdeen? he I had had so mean an opinion of all my life? I could not believe it from his words; I could not recognise him, looking into his glowing face.

"Yours is a high spirit," said Markingham; "it may take you up that steepest way you speak of so prettily, but as a rule, a high spirit, backed by no friends and no money, meets with a barrier at every step, and makes a thousand enemies."

"I will mount the barriers, and defy the enemies."

"Metaphor is not reality," was Markingham's reply; "and it is better to boast after the action is performed than before the first step is made into the world you *defy*."

"I have made the step, Sir," answered Heberdeen, junior, becoming more lofty and reserved; "and I do not find the dif-

difficulties in the way insurmountable. I have chosen my path, and exchanged college for government service."

"A clerk?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Did not the hand of a stranger assist you there?" asked Markingham, with some of his old severity. "Do you call that starting alone in the world, when a patron flings down the first bar to your progress? Boy, your heroics have been misapplied."

"There sits the patron to whom I am indebted," said young Heberdeen, pointing to his father.

"Ah! but that patron sought a second."

"No," replied the Squire; "he merely claimed the fulfilment of a promise made in times past when I had other views for my boy."

"Still there *was* a helping hand," insisted Markingham, "and your son need not have been so virtuously indignant at an offer of assistance from his father's friend."

"My father's adversary," cried the son; "one who may be that adversary again some day."

"I think not, Ned," said the Squire.

"Did not Counsellor Hetherington say——"

"Have we not had enough law to last a life-time, Edmund?" interposed Miss Heberdeen, "or has it still its dangerous attractions?"

"It is at all events foreign to the subject," replied her brother, "and I stand corrected. You see that I am keeping my promise, Harriet," he added, smiling at his sister, "and am exercising a proper restraint over myself."

She said something in a lower tone, which escaped all ears but his, and he, reddening again and glancing at Markingham, said:—

"No."

"It would be more graceful of you, Edmund."

"No, Harriet, better as it is."

"I am not aware that there is anything more to say," observed Mr. Markingham, as he rose, and I imitated his example; "I have made an offer, it has been declined, and there is an end to business! I don't blame you, Edmund Heberdeen, for the manner in which you have refused my services—certain events are too recent perhaps to allow of many polite speeches."

There seemed a struggle in Edmund Heberdeen's breast to reply, but the answer came at last.

"I may have unintentionally given offence to you this morning, Sir," said he, in a hesitating manner. "Will you let a hasty temperament plead my excuse?"

Mr. Markingham bowed.

"I am not yet accustomed to the great change," he continued—"cannot believe my will is no longer law, or that I, a Heberdeen, am to receive instead of to bestow. The change will do me good eventually, and teach me my right place in society, but"—with a sigh—"it requires time to get over it."

"Even our loss of fortune has brought comfort to me," said the Squire; "for it has assured me of my children's love, and brought their best qualities to the light. As for you, Ned," laying a hand affectionately on his son's shoulder, "it will make a man of you."

"Do you think so?" with a smile.

"I am sure of it. In the past, I was all fears for your future; now, in the present, I look forward with confidence!"

Mr. Markingham and I went down stairs thoughtfully; there was something for both to consider in the interview which had just closed. With Markingham it revived many old associations, with me some contrasts, some regrets. My position did not appear to me so enviable as it did a few hours since. It might be a fine thing to be a gentleman, but to make your own way in the world, how much more satisfactory!

When we were rattling away from Great Coram Street, with a wiry little terrier barking fiercely at the horses, and dodging in and out the carriage wheels, I said:—

"They bear their losses well, Sir."

"Better than I expected," was the brief response.

"They don't appear to be unhappy, but then they are not so very poor."

"Had they fallen as low as Barker Street, it would not have made much difference," said Markingham. "That is a fiery young rascal, the son. Do you know how old he is?"

"He must be nearly one and twenty."

"The father was not many years older when he married my cousin. He has been a lucky man all his life."

"The stream runs against him now, Sir."

"Doubtful, doubtful," mused Mr. Markingham. "He has his children round him; he will never know the desolation, the awful sense of loneliness that I have experienced in my unhappy life. It is not the dimensions of a room or what is enclosed in its four walls that make the heart light; it is that

which constitutes a home—the faces of the loved and the tried. Has the Squire of Nettleton any cause to complain, to envy me and my position, with such a son—such a daughter? A daughter,” he repeated, “who makes up for the lost—in whom the lost lives again.”

“Has she grown so like her mother, Sir?”

“So like, that when I looked into her face I went back two and twenty years.”

CHAPTER II.

PAVING THE WAY.

WAS Miss Bowden right in her prophecy that I should never be a happy man? Was it my nature never to feel the blessing of content? When a child, dissatisfied with my position; when a servant to my uncle, reckless and jealous of his authority; and now, in my new grand home, fretful and gloomy in the midst of greatness.

Still, I had made my choice; I would not draw back now and begin life for myself like young Heberdeen. I would think no more concerning him, or on that which was calculated to depress me. I was a young man with the brightest prospect before me; surely there was a good chance of being happy now!

I made up my mind to proceed to Grove House at last; I decided on the day, and I took my way thither one evening, with the express purpose of burying the hatchet for ever. I felt rather uncomfortable about the throat, and a little too tight in the waistcoat, as I dragged my way slowly along the carriage-drive of Grove House. It was the prodigal nephew returning full of repentance and apologies, and doubtful of the reception that awaited him.

The servant who opened the door to my summons knew me again, and was the first to testify her surprise at my reappearance. I have no doubt she knew all my antecedents, the why and the wherefore of my long absence, &c. Doors don't have keyholes for nothing.

“Will you be kind enough to take my card to Mr. Woodleigh?”

"Old Mr. Woodleigh, Sir?"

"Ahem—yes."

"Will you step into the waiting-room?"

This was rather stiff and formal for a beginning, I thought, as I entered a small room to the left of the hall. However, there was not much time for thought; the door had scarcely closed before it was reopened, and my uncle skipped briskly into the room.

"Oh! here you are, Sir. So you have turned up at last, have you? Well, well, well, what have you got to say for yourself, now?"

"To say that I acted in a foolish manner at Richmond, Mr. Woodleigh," I replied; "to express my regrets for the annoyance which I caused you—and more than you, I fear—to wish that I could cancel the day for ever from my memory."

"You are perfectly sure that you were in the wrong, now?"

"Yes, uncle."

"And so am I; and there's an end of it. How d'ye do?"

He shook my hands in his, laughed, then became suddenly grave again.

"I intended to be more stern with you than this, my fine fellow," said he; "I told Upton just now I should take you seriously to task for your extraordinary conduct. Why, Robert, you were as mad as a March hare."

"True enough, Sir."

"And oh! by the way, the next time you play the fool, Robert, you won't do it before so many people, will you?"

"It depends upon the cause of offence, Sir," I replied; "but I hope to grow more wise as I grow older."

"Well, there is no harm in *hoping* that," responded Uncle Woodleigh, with a doubtful expression of countenance.

The door opened, and my Cousin Upton entered. He looked gravely at me, and would have contented himself with a stiff bow, had I not advanced and offered him my hand.

"At last," said he sententiously.

"Better late than never, Upton," I replied. "I trust you think so."

"I don't know that yet," said he, with an emphatic shake of the head.

"He can't say more than that he is very sorry, and all that sort of thing, Upton," said my uncle.

"Oh! he has said as much as that?"

"Yes—he said—hanged if I haven't forgotten what he said, but Robert will tell you again—now then!"

In as few words as possible I expressed my regret for the occurrence which had separated us, and Upton eyed me steadily whilst I ate my humble pie.

"So much for Buckingham," said Upton; "and now, friend Woodleigh, what has brought you here after eight months' contemptuous silence? It is not repentance, for you must have felt that disagreeable sensation the day after your folly; and it is not friendship, for that would have actuated you months since."

"Repentance and friendship would have drawn me to you all the next day, had I been my own master," I answered; "but I had been your servant, had received an uncerecermonious dismissal, and I was afraid you might think—that is, I thought——"

"We know, we know," said Upton, with a laugh; "that is Robert Woodleigh to the life. Studying what people think of him, and ruling his actions by imaginary events. Well, are you your own master, then?"

"Yes."

My uncle stared at me.

"Entirely your own master—quite the gentleman?"

"Yes."

"Upon my word I cannot wish you joy very heartily," said Upton; "for if you are so explosive beneath the pressure of circumstances, what is to be the result when the safety-valve of wholesome restraint is removed?"

"The first result is to bring me to Grove House."

"It's very singular when I come to think of it," exclaimed Upton. "To own you were in the wrong, to speak not a word of extenuating circumstances."

"Ah! I could offer a defence perhaps," I said; "but it is an unpleasant story to revive—shall we let it drop for ever?"

"Yes, and now the new story—or suppose you reserve it for the ladies. Shall we adjourn to the drawing-room?"

"With pleasure."

So the worst was got over. I had fraternised with my uncle and Upton, and there were only the ladies to face.

The ladies! Cousin Constance—for whose sake I had talked of repentance, and had not sought to justify my conduct in the least—Caroline, my aunt, Miss Bowden, and little Mary. They

were all there ; I had to face them at once and tell the story of my rise in life, and of the patron I had found.

My welcome was a little warmer from my aunt and female cousins—my expression of regret was sufficient to soften their hearts and render them forgiving, and when I had told my story and spoken of my prospects, there was a shower of congratulations to receive.

“Dear me, Mr. Markingham must be a singular man,” remarked Aunt Woodleigh ; “not a friend in the world but you, —poor fellow !”

Upton laughed, and my aunt continued :—

“And so he has come into the Heberdeen property, and the Heberdeens have become poor, just as we were beginning to think what nice people they were. We knew that they had met with reverses, young Mr. Heberdeen was the first to tell us that—now I come to think of it, I don’t believe he has been here since.”

I could not help glancing across the table at Constance, or feeling my heart sink as I saw her head bend for a moment still lower over the fancy-work at which she was engaged.

But *he* had not been there since—he was honourable enough not to seek after the prize, now his new position debarred him from treasuring it as it deserved ; there was hope for me now ; they might never meet again—if there had been any romance, any “foolish and rubbishing sentiment,” between them, that would soon die away, as my silent and earnest attention made progress !

And sometimes, after that night, I was vain enough to think there might come to me that happy era of life when youth finds its bliss in the smiles of the loved.

For Constance was a riddle to me, which I interpreted my own way. I found a reason for her smiles, I attributed to maiden modesty her reserve, and when she was thoughtful—and she had become more thoughtful lately—there was a satisfaction in thinking that I might be the subject of her reverie. So I followed up the chase quietly and secretly, and there seemed no rival in the way to balk me.

I had not revisited Grove House, Paddington, a dozen times, before there was food for reflection in the manner of my reception by the respective members of the family. My uncle was the same as usual—in a grave humour or an irritable one, according as business had agreed with him during the day ; but there were certain shades of difference in the rest of my rela-

tions. My aunt was more than usually friendly, appeared to be struck with my merits and virtues, was the only one who paid deference to my new and altered position—which, by the way, she talked of at times when her children or her ailments were not under discussion.

“What a fortunate thing for you, Robert, my dear—how grateful you ought to feel for the good things of life which have fallen to your share! How old is Mr. Markingham?”

“Forty-four or five, I believe.”

“Not older—oh, dear! he may marry again,” cried my aunt. I thought that he was an elderly gentleman, with white hair, and the very picture of feebleness. Only forty-five!”

“I don’t think he entertains a very great respect for the marriage state, aunt.”

“Ah! these railers always suddenly take it into their heads to get married. But still, my dear nephew, I hope, for your sake, that he will not.”

“And, if it be a happy state, I hope he will, aunt,” I answered; “I am not very anxious for the best place in his will.”

My aunt did not understand my motives, possibly did not believe what I said. She was certainly curious concerning Mr. Markingham’s future, and anxious about mine. At times I thought my rise in life had suggested a dream in her mind akin to my own, and I was always amiable and attentive to her in consequence, for to have the mother on one’s side is three-fourths of the way to success!

This gracious manner of my aunt did not extend to the rest of the family; there was something to damp me, especially in the way my frequent visits to Grove House were received by Caroline and Upton. Caroline was always glad to see me—there was no disallowing that—but she was grave in her demeanour and occasionally thoughtful. I could see that she naturally suspected a reason for my frequent visits, though she did not appear to take such pains to separate me from Constance as she had previously exhibited; she let me take my chance of winning my way, although she sat and observed all that passed on both sides.

Upton Woodleigh received me in a more embarrassed manner; he appeared to have something on his mind which troubled him. Once or twice, when I had found an opportunity to steal to Constance’s side and ask silly and uninteresting questions about the fancy-work she was engaged on, or the last book she

had read, Upton would spoil the harmony of a *tête-à-tête* by coming to my side of the table and aggravating my feelings by stories of business and contracts.

This was the condition of affairs at the end of May, 1846.

About that period Markingham spoke of my love-story.

"You have not mentioned anything concerning your hopes and fears at Grove House since that first burst of confidence, Woodleigh," said he, one evening when I was preparing to depart in the usual direction; "is the lady with the anchor in the ascendant?"

I blushed as I replied:—

"I don't know, Sir. I am still in doubt."

"You are quite sure that she is the one guiding star—the bright creation—the glorious angel of your dreams, &c., &c."

"I shall never like anybody else, Sir. Oh! Mr. Markingham, if you would only come with me one evening and see her."

"Shall I not see her often enough when she is your wife?"

This question covered me with boyish confusion.

"Well, when you are engaged, then. Time enough for a wife when you are three or four-and-twenty."

"So long as that, Sir?"

"'Marry in haste and repent at leisure,' is one aphorism; and 'Look before you leap,' is another," said Markingham, "and when the leap is once taken, repentance comes too late."

"I shall never repent that step."

"Will you ever have the chance, Woodleigh? Why don't you put an end to your doubts to-night?"

"Good Heavens, Sir, to-night?"

"Why not? Better to have the 'No' at once, than two years hence, when the thoughts have dwelt so long on the hopes that to turn them aside is to tear them up by the roots!"

"Do you think it will be 'No,' then?" I asked, anxiously.

"How can I tell, Woodleigh?" answered Markingham. "I know nothing of the lady, or her sentiments. Does your aunt treat you graciously?"

"Very."

"There is a good chance, then. Try the aunt first."

Strangely enough, a chance of confession presented itself that very night. I found the drawing-room of Grove House looking desolate, with only Aunt Woodleigh and Miss Bowden therein.

"Upton has taken his sisters and Johnny to the theatre," said Mrs. Woodleigh, in explanation; "and I fear that they will not return till late. Don't let your politeness, Robert, keep you from more pleasant company."

"The company of Aunt Woodleigh is all that is pleasant and desirable," I answered courteously.

Aunt Woodleigh appeared pleased by my flattery; in fact, so thoroughly amiable was she that evening, that, taking advantage of Miss Bowden retiring from the room, I hastily resolved to plunge through the ice, and lay before my aunt the true state of my feelings.

I paved the way to the confession with an artfulness that Mrs. Woodleigh did not dream of—I brought the conversation round to the ever-fresh subject of her children—made inquiries concerning Dick and his college, glanced from Dick to Upton, from Upton to the striking likeness—although there wasn't any—between him and his sister Constance, and then got frightened and darted back to Dick again, over whose virtues and talents I hung with a fondness that even surprised his doting mother. I made the attempt at last—the hours were stealing on, and Uncle Woodleigh was expected from the Edgware Road.

"And now, aunt, talking about Constance——"

"About Richard, my dear," corrected Mrs. Woodleigh.

"Yes, and Richard too—but I wish to speak of Constance now, if—if you please, aunt."

I coughed once or twice to clear my throat, but the more I coughed the more husky I got.

"She's a dear girl, Robert. Well?"

My aunt crossed her hands in her lap and sat the picture of attention.

"Well, aunt, the truth is," said I, looking on the ground and speaking slowly, "that I am very fond of Constance—that I haven't seen her all this time for nothing, and that—that—that I love her very dearly! Oh! aunt," cried I, bursting into eloquence with a suddenness that made her jump nearly out of her chair, "you do not know how dearly I love Constance—I set my heart upon her from the first day I saw her in this room! Dear aunt, I come to confess my secret to you, to conceal nothing from you—to ask if you will give me leave to tell her all, and trust my eternal happiness to her answer."

Aunt Woodleigh's nerves were not very strong, and al-

though she had in a degree been prepared for my confession, yet she was not for my excitement, and therefore, to my horror, went off into a hysterical fit of crying that threatened to alarm the whole house. However, she got over it better than I expected, and with the assistance of a bottle of smelling salts, which was fortunately in her lap, I brought her to her senses before any member of the establishment had been summoned as a witness.

"Dear me, dear me," panted Mrs. Woodleigh, "what a boisterous young man you are, to be sure! When you went off into that fit of passion, I thought of the pic-nic, and was half afraid you would jump on me, and try to throttle me—Mr. Heberdeen's dog, you know! And you are fond of Constance? Oh! my, how young you are!"

"Nineteen next November, aunt."

"Well, I don't know what to say, Robert," whimpered my aunt; "it's very shocking—I mean it's very sudden, though I expected it!"

"I hope you have no objections to urge, aunt?"

"I can't say much about it, Robert," answered my aunt; "it is matter for discussion between your uncle and Caroline—what a dreadful twitter I'm in—all of a shake, like a calf's-foot jelly!—and they'll know what is proper to be done in an instant. I don't see myself any objection, if your prospects are good—which they are now, I have no doubt. I'll mention it to your uncle and Caroline, Robert, the first opportunity, you may rely upon it, and——"

"But, my dear aunt," I interposed, "I would rather ascertain Constance's feelings towards me before it becomes a matter for family discussion. There will be no occasion for argument—for an interview with Mr. Markingham—for anything, if—if she won't have me!"

"I don't quite understand you, Robert."

"I should like to see Constance—to tell her all that I have told you."

"My dear nephew, you would frighten her to death," cried my aunt; "if you were to burst into one of your explosive fits, I wouldn't answer for the consequences!"

"I will be quite calm, aunt, upon my word I will! I'll not say one word to alarm her."

"Well. If I prepare her for your proposals——"

"No, don't do that; you are sure to say something—I beg pardon, Mrs. Woodleigh, but don't do that, if you please!"

"What is it you want me to do then?" inquired my aunt, in a bewildered manner.

"To let things take their own way for a time—to let me wait my opportunity. To say nothing to my uncle, my cousins, or Miss Bowden about my confessions of this evening—confessions which were due to you as the mother of Constance, but which I don't think there is any occasion to make known to all the world."

Mrs. Woodleigh still hesitated, but my persuasions had at last their effect. It was decided that nothing should be said of my revelation until Constance had responded Yes or No to the great question of life.

My aunt did not entirely recover her composure the remainder of my stay, and I was more than once doubtful if I had acted rightly in making the revelation to this feeble-minded member of the family. She talked of Constance all the time we were alone together, of her youth and of mine—of the necessity of a long engagement between us, supposing Constance's answer were all that I could wish. She cried a great deal too—just as if we were married already, and were going away in five minutes or so on our honeymoon trip, and though she thought we might make a happy couple, yet now she came to consider the matter, first cousins were very near relations, and she had heard many strong objections to marriages between them!

When my uncle was "at home" at Grove House, and Miss Bowden had rejoined us in the drawing-room, Mrs. Woodleigh made an effort to recover her composure, and succeeded pretty well in the attempt. Once or twice I fancied the sharp eyes of Miss Bowden were taking note of my aunt's trembling hands and of the lace handkerchief's frequent application to the eyes, but as she made no remark on the same, the evening passed quietly away without anything more to disturb me.

I went home in a happier frame of mind than I had experienced since my rise to greatness; I had made one step forward, and met with no repulse to my hopes. Might not the next step, when that opportunity came for which I waited, leave the dark shades of doubt for ever in the background, and open unto me a glimpse of Paradise?

CHAPTER III.

“TO BE OR NOT TO BE ?”

THE opportunity is not long in coming when he who seeks it is ever on the watch. It is the secret of half the failures in the world, that want of watchfulness for the opportunity which comes once, perhaps twice, in the time of our scheming. The turn of the tide takes but a moment, and if we stray from the path, or nod at our post, the opportunity to become rich, to catch the patron in his best humour, to make love to the fair one of our choice, flits away like a dream, and we stand empty-handed on the brink of despair.

Still, though the opportunity may lead to success, there are times when it but widens the wound at the heart, and adds bitterness to the cup from which the unfortunate drinks. To watch for the opportunity that is to dash every hope to the ground, is the fortune of war sometimes, and he who escapes has fair cause to be grateful !

I waited, watched. My mind was made up, and my nerves steeled for the task. I knew that every day which passed made Aunt Woodleigh's task of keeping my secret the more difficult, and each hour was a study that I never neglected. The day and the hour came at length, and they are well remembered. It was the middle of June, a fair summer day, a bright afternoon, with a blue cloudless heaven above my head, and the earth at my feet bathed in sunshine. A day to be hopeful, birds in full song, and flowers full of bloom and fragrance—a day fit for a lover !

I had been watching Grove House like a faithful swain since one o'clock in the day, hoping for the chance of Constance coming out alone, or with her sister Mary, or even with her mother, and as the clock of a church in the vicinity was striking three, the opportunity presented itself, though not in the manner I expected.

From my post of observation behind an unromantic-looking turnpike I saw the door of Grove House open, and Aunt Woodleigh, Miss Bowden, little Mary and Johnny descend the broad flight of steps. The fine day had evidently tempted my aunt to an unwonted piece of exercise, for she came slowly in my direction, leaning on the arm of Miss Bowden, and I, anxious not to be discovered at that particular moment, shifted my

position as she advanced, and backed cautiously round the turnpike. It was a work of difficulty, and required delicacy of action, for there were a great many carriages and omnibuses passing, and I stood a fair chance of being run over and unceremoniously ending my wooing under a wheel.

However, I was successful in my manoeuvres, and had the satisfaction of seeing the parasols of my aunt and Miss Bowden gracefully recede, and the figures of my little cousins become "beautifully less." I stood by the side of the turnpike-man, who had been eyeing me suspiciously for the last two hours, and asked myself if the opportunity had not arrived? There was no one at Grove House save Constance and her sister Caroline, and Upton and my uncle were at business, little thinking of the conspiracy hatching in my brain. Should I ever have a better chance? Was it not even likely that Caroline Woodleigh would stand my friend? would, at all events, suffer me to speak to Constance and make the confession I desired? Might not Constance even be alone practising the piano in the drawing-room, or strolling round the garden?

Yes, here was the opportunity come at last, and yet I hesitated. What hope had I of gaining her?—what encouragement had she ever given me?—why should I expose myself to unnecessary pain, to the agony of rejection, to the horrors of despair? What was to become of me afterwards, when all had been confessed, and I had received the cold answer that was to shatter my day-dreams? Was it not better to live on in uncertainty, than wake to a truth which made all desolation? Still, IF!—and that glorious IF decided me.

"To be or not to be, I'll make the venture," I muttered, and pulling my hat over my brows, I crossed the road and made a rush at Grove House. There was a smart-looking postman already under the portico, and his heavy "Rap-rap" saved me the necessity of knocking. The postman looked at me as I stood on the steps by his side, and I blushed as vividly as if the object of my coming was advertised on my hat.

I glanced at the letter in his hand, a neatly folded epistle, with the address painfully distinct. The postman seemed to hold it in an aggravating manner towards me, and I read:—

"Miss Constance Woodleigh,
"Grove House, Paddington,"

in a flourishing masculine hand. That letter began to trouble me on the instant. Who could be the writer? What male

friend had Cousin Constance with whom she corresponded? It was neither Upton's handwriting, nor my uncle's, and it was not probable that Richard Woodleigh would trouble himself to write to one who could lend him no money—now who on earth could it be? What right had the fellow to write in that brazen manner, and flourish every capital letter in that pretentious style, I should like to know? I wish I had him on the doorstep!

I had become quite one of the family again; consequently the maid-servant who opened the door was not particularly surprised to see me as I stepped into the hall.

"Any of the ladies within, Jenny?"

"Miss Caroline is in the drawing-room, Mr. Woodleigh."

"And—ahem—Miss Constance?"

"She's in the drawing-room too, Sir."

"Oh!"

"Why could not Jenny, the maid of Grove House, have stated that fact at once instead of making me look ridiculous?" I thought, as I wended my way slowly towards the drawing-room door, preceded by Jenny aforesaid.

"Mr. Woodleigh, Miss."

I entered, looking as sheepish as most nervous people would have done under the circumstances. They were both there; Caroline busy with some simple, straightforward "white-work,"—she was a practical young lady, and did not waste time over Berlin wool and Broderie Anglaise—and Constance, book in hand, at her feet, in a pretty, bewitching, lovable attitude. True picture, to be seen in more than one light—symbolical of the prosaic life of one, of the dreamy nature of the other—one confident in herself, the other at her feet, submissive, trustful, full of love and gentleness!

"Robert," exclaimed both my cousins as I advanced, and "Has anything happened?" added Caroline.

"Happened?" I repeated. "Oh, no!"

"I thought that you were looking pale," said Caroline, with that sharp Woodleigh glance, which for some reason or other I always took pains to avoid; "and coupling your looks with the favour of this early call, I was afraid that you had heard bad news from Edgware Road."

"No, Caroline, I have not heard from Edgware Road to-day."

Whilst this little dialogue was taking place, and before I had seated myself near my cousins, the maid-servant had

tendered the letter to Constance. I saw her start as she looked at the letter on the salver, turn pale, even blush, as she stretched forth one little trembling hand towards it.

"Caroline," she murmured, "see here, dear!"

Caroline said nothing till the maid had retired and I was seated by the table fidgeting with a mother-of-pearl paper-knife.

"A letter, dear?" said Caroline, in the most matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes," faltered Constance, turning it from one side to the other; "will you look at it, Carry?"

"I look!" said Caroline; "nonsense, my dear, it is not my letter."

"But you could tell me if——" began Constance beseechingly, until checked by her elder sister.

"What a silly little thing you are, Constance," said Caroline; "there, go into the garden and read for yourself—don't trouble me with your foolish friends' letters."

Constance waited for no second bidding; she was on her feet, her face blushing, her ringlets dancing, her bosom gently heaving.

"I shall not be long, dear."

Across the room, through the open French window, down the steps into the spacious garden at the back of Grove House, Paddington.

"I hope there is nothing to alarm Constance in that letter," I remarked, hoarsely.

"I hope not," replied Caroline, in the dryest tones.

I looked at her. She was working busily; and though she appeared the gravest of maidens, I fancied that I could detect a suppressed smile at the corners of the mouth.

There ensued a few minutes' silence. Caroline sewed on with her needle, and patiently waited for me to resume the conversation.

"Is aunt out?" was my next question, for the want of something better to say.

"Yes, she has gone on a little shopping excursion with Miss Bowden."

"Indeed."

"Will you not put your hat in the hall, Robert?" asked Caroline, looking curiously at that article of my attire, which formed the centre ornament of the lloo table.

"N—no, no, thank you," I answered; "I am not going

to make a long stay—I just called as I was passing, you see, and——”

Crack went the paper-knife, leaving the jagged handle in my restless hand.

Caroline looked up, then went on with her work again.

“Have you broken it?” was the quiet question.

“Yes,” said I, flinging the handle on the table; “and a foolish trick it was of mine! I’m always foolish when I have something on my mind, it seems.”

“And what has Robert Woodleigh on his mind to trouble and perplex him?” she asked.

“A great deal, cousin. More than I should like to own to all my friends and acquaintances—much that I must own to you and,” with a maniacal gesture towards the window, “to *her*.”

“Not to her,” said Caroline, setting her work aside, and treating me to another searching look; “not to her, I think.”

“Yes, to Constance, I must tell her that——”

I paused—my hoarseness was getting worse.

“Go on, Robert.”

“Oh! Caroline, you know as well as I do,” I burst forth; “I see you read all my thoughts, are aware of all that has made my heart and brain ache since I have known your sister.”

I made a step towards the garden and then stopped, checked by her rapid interposition between me and the window.

“Robert Woodleigh,” she said, calmly, “I can answer all your questions, set at rest your doubts, save you and Constance unnecessary excitement, put an end to a folly that has lasted much too long.”

“No, no, no,” I cried, losing all regard for time and place, forgetting the respect due to her, and forgetting myself, too, as usual; “I will not have one word of explanation from you. She must hear me, hear what I have to say—to offer—her own lips must end the folly of my dreams, not my Cousin Caroline’s.”

Caroline turned pale. Once, for a fleeting moment, her lip quivered.

“Robert,” she said, gently, “you have been a poor foolish fellow—wilfully blind to what a child might see. In your headstrong passion you have rushed on, heeding no sign or warning, paining yourself and giving pain to others.”

"Let me see her, Caroline—it is the last time that I will pain her, on my honour!"

"I tell you that it is useless—hopeless. I know your secret—I knew hers long ago!"

"And hers?" I asked eagerly.

"Does not concern her Cousin Robert."

I must have changed colour very strangely—God knows how awfully strange I felt that moment!—for Caroline was at my side, her hand upon my arm.

"Some other time, Robert, I will tell you her story—some other time, if you insist, she shall listen to your own. You are not master of yourself now, and now in particular she is full of other thoughts and hopes!"

"Some other time!" I reiterated bitterly, "why seek to put me off with idle promises—to treat me like a child?"

"You act like a child, Robert," she answered sadly.

"I feel a man's intensity of passion, and I would know like a man my answer."

"I have given it you."

"It is not enough, true as it may be. Let her say but one word, and I will be content."

Caroline hesitated a moment, and I said:—

"I had her mother's consent to speak to her—it is my right, Caroline, why seek to hinder me?"

"Because my sister is as sensitive and as easily overcome as that mother to whom you have revealed your passion. It was a false step to pour out your boyish rhapsody to one so ill-calculated to listen calmly—it was inconsiderate and selfish."

I coloured beneath the reproof—I felt it just enough.

"You advanced not your own interest, and you entrusted your secret to one who might wish you well, but who had not the power to assist you. Did I not tell you, one Sunday evening long ago, such confessions must not trouble my weak mother?"

"Your mother was my friend."

"I would have been your friend too—your best friend, for I should have saved you three weeks of suspense."

"Perhaps so, but you save me not from suspense now—you but add to it, and torture me. Let me have my answer from Constance herself; I repeat, one word will be sufficient—and then let me go away and never trouble her again."

"Robert, I fear that I cannot trust you. Knowing your

wildness, your strange fits of excitement, I feel assured that word will not content you."

"Come with me then, and be my witness—it is best; you will be a friend and a support to her—a check to me."

"If it must be so then!" answered Caroline with a sigh.

We went out of the room bare-headed, and down the stone steps into the garden and the sunshine, a grave and thoughtful pair.

Along the winding gravel-walks, both silent; the birds singing, the flowers blooming—a lover's day indeed! At the extremity of the garden, in the shady summer-house, half hidden by the roses, sat Constance Woodleigh, an open letter in her hand. She had been crying, and there were tears still swimming in her eyes.

"Is this a time?" asked Caroline in a low tone as we advanced.

"No time more fitting for me," was my stern reply.

"Let to-day go by, Robert."

"No, let to-day end every hope of mine in life."

"Life!" she cried hastily; "you have not begun it yet."

"I have seen much of sorrow then in my——"

"Hush! she will hear you."

Constance had risen at our approach, had already, as if by instinct, flown to her sister's side. She glanced at me an instant, and her cheek flushed beneath my gaze. If in one single moment of her young life she had never known my secret passion, she must have read it then; and in her frightened look, in her turning to Caroline and clinging to her fondly, I read aright its hopeless nature.

My excitement seemed to vanish and an unnatural calmness to replace it as I stood before the sisters.

"Shall I speak?" asked Caroline.

"No," I answered.

"But——"

"But you may trust me now, Miss Woodleigh. Give me but one moment."

I took breath for my next few words. There was little to ask, with the truth before me. I should be glad to say all and go—she shrank and hid her face so from my burning eyes.

"Constance—cousin—I have been very foolish," I said; "have had since my prosperity such vain dreams of you, nourished such wild hopes that even I have not the heart to

pain you by allusion to them. I came to ask you a question—let me go now without troubling you to answer it. I am convinced.”

“Better to end all now,” murmured Caroline ; “it is too late to withdraw.”

“I have said that I am convinced ! ”

“Constance,” said Caroline, not heeding my reply, “Robert came here to offer you his hand, his heart, to tell you how long and truly he has loved you. Do you think that you can hold him out one hope—that you can in the future learn to love him in return ? ”

“Oh ! no—no, never to love him,” cried Constance, burying her face in her sister’s bosom ; “tell him all, dear Caroline—it will be best.”

“My sister is engaged to Mr. Heberdeen.”

“Now ? ”

“Engaged to be his wife in the future, when he is able to maintain her as she deserves and we expect. Whilst there was no hope of that, my brother Upton and I refused our consent to an engagement—to-day’s letter from Mr. Heberdeen removes all difficulty, Constance, does it not ? ”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“I thought so,” said Caroline ; “and now, Robert, you see why all could have been better explained without the presence of this blushing girl. It is an embarrassing explanation, but it sets aside idle speculation on your part, and when you have recovered from your disappointment, which you soon will, Robert, or you are indeed a child—it will place us in our old friendly position towards each other, and make all this an idle dream.”

“To you, a dream—to me, the waking to a harsh reality. Our friendly position must cease now, Miss Woodleigh—if not for ever, at least for some years—till—till—” said I, struggling with my voice, “I have, as you say, recovered from my disappointment. That will take time, I know, and till that time comes—good-bye ! ”

I caught their hands in mine and pressed them ; I raised one, white and trembling, for a moment to my lips, and then I hurried away, and the bright phantasy was over !

CHAPTER IV

MORE PHILOSOPHY.

"ROBERT, what is the matter? How long have you been sitting here in the dark?"

I raised my head from my folded arms and looked up.

"Not long. An hour or two, I believe."

"Look a little sensible till the servant has brought in the lights, my friend," said Mr. Markingham, as he rang the bell.

The servant, at the summons, brought in wax candles and retired. Mr. Markingham, in full dress, an opera-glass in his white-gloved hand, stood at a little distance surveying me attentively

"Do you see what inroads time has made into the night, Woodleigh?" he said, pointing to the gilt clock on the mantel-piece.

"No," I answered moodily.

"Listen, then."

The hammer fell on the bell as he spoke, and gave warning that the day was over.

"Twelve!" said Markingham; "some three hours in the dark. The servants will think you mad, Woodleigh."

"Let them think!"

"Ah! I see where the land lies to-night," said Markingham, slowly drawing off his gloves; "you have not been enjoying yourself much this evening. I have been to the opera to hear Grisi. I waited for you till eight—where were you?"

"Wandering about the streets like an outcast as I am!"

"Humph! One of your bad fits on," said Markingham. "Do you know, Woodleigh, I fancy that you have your evil hour sometimes, like the heroes of old-fashioned romances?"

"My evil hours have been many then, and will be more."

"Come, Woodleigh," said Markingham, dropping into a chair near me, "all this nonsense is childish and unworthy of you. What a demon of discontent must ever be sitting—Man of the Mountain fashion—on your shoulders!"

"Never to be shaken off," I added passionately; "to weigh me down, and render every action purposeless!"

"Well; and now, what is the secret which makes that demon so lively to-night?"

"It matters not."

"It matters to me," was my patron's answer.

"To you—why?"

"I may have a charm to exorcise that troublesome spirit which thus haunts you."

"There is no charm under heaven that can make my heart light again," I cried; "I have lost every hope in life, every chance of being happy, and I don't care what becomes of me!"

"There is a moral about 'Don't care' in a pretty spelling-book I'll lend you to-morrow."

"Mr. Markingham," I stammered forth, "I have had enough to bear to-day—don't add your sarcasms to my misery, or ill will come of it."

Mr. Markingham laughed.

"In faith, Woodleigh, I could not forbear a fillip at your morbid sentiments, they are so unreal and so very extravagant," he replied; "I have no doubt you feel miserable enough to-night, but to every night there follows a morning, and we blush in the daylight for yesterday's follies. Your morning is not far distant—why talk of losing all the hopes and chances of life at nineteen years of age?"

I crossed my arms upon the table, and hid my face between them again. I was not anxious to discuss the question or continue the conversation.

After a long silence, disturbed but by the brisk ticking of the timepiece and the roll, roll of the carriage wheels in the street, I felt Markingham's hand upon my shoulder.

"Robert the dreamer," said he, in tones so soft and gentle that I started, "I have expected such an hour as this would come, and have been studying how to best prepare you for it. You have had a disappointment, and perhaps your nature leads you to feel it more bitterly than ninety-nine out of a hundred boys of your age. Still, there is nothing new or strange in your sufferings; thousands have felt them, wept over them, and have become as good men as ever afterwards—we can't have all we ask for in this world, and so much the better for all of us. Say that you had set your hopes of happiness on your cousin, and fate tears them away and leaves you half-desolate—that is not despair, for other hopes will arise in good time, and when the curtain draws aside again, what a fair landscape may be exposed to the view!"

"Never for me, Sir!"

"Eighteen summers and three-quarters murmurs that,

with the wound a few hours old; what will one and twenty say?"

"The same—the same."

His hand pressed more heavily on me as he said:—

"It is the misfortune of most men to set their hearts on the unattainable in the outset of life; there is a first-love for each of us to sigh for, to grow foolish over—to *lose*! You have been lucky to lose yours early—before manhood has moulded your character and strengthened your mind. Every fresh place and scene, every new face, will help to erase the impression, and life in the gayest of colours will brighten the future. Woodleigh, I began later, loved longer, had more encouragement from her whom I hoped to call mine, saw her every day, and sat at her feet sunned by her smiles. It was the eve of an engagement between us; she had seen no one to love, and believed in my worship. Then there came the revulsion, the rival stepped forth from the clouds and snatched the prize from my grasp. It was finished, and the baseless fabric fell to the hard earth—a ruin!"

"And did not *you* feel despair?—did not that disappointment of life alter you for ever?"

"It changed the current of events, and perhaps made an old bachelor of me."

"Your future did not brighten, then—you did not meet with the new scenes and faces you talk of to me."

"I met with reverses, Woodleigh," he replied; "all my disappointments came at once. The loss of my father and my father's estate helped to add to the weight, and I sank to poverty, which, by the way, is a harder trial than love. But," his hand pressing my arm again, "I did not despair, Woodleigh; with all those trials, which, you must own, were greater than yours, I did not crouch into a corner and shut out the daylight. Did you not meet a philosopher on the high-road to London years ago, one who looked at the world favourably, and who tried hard enough to make the best of his troubles? Certainly I had my fits of horrors sometimes, but they were not for the world, and my strong will soon subdued them and brought the lighter thoughts uppermost. That is a good motto—'Make the best of it!'"

"I will try—you must give me time."

"The memory of my 'cut direct' would not have lasted twenty-two years had I remained a man with money in my purse! I would have snapped my fingers at my rival and set

out to see the world—would have drowned in the world's giddiness, as in the wine-cup, the remembrance of what a fool I had made myself in the days that were gone—would have taken the first opportunity to fall in love a second time, and start a home, wife and children, in dead opposition ! ”

I sat up and surveyed my moral preacher. There was wisdom in his advice, although Mr. Bowden would have seen in it much to object to. There was something in it that pleased me amidst all the turmoil at my brain, something that suited with my recklessness of the future. “Drown in the world's giddiness, as in the wine-cup, the remembrance of what a fool I had been ! ” Yes, that would be good policy—why should I mourn over the unalterable past ?

“Woodleigh, what do you say to a year's travel ?—two years ? Is there anything to keep us sour old bachelors in London ? Let us up and away to the gay worlds across the Channel, and see if we can meet in life with two such grim faces as our own. Two years will bring you back to England a man. Do you remember the name of Jerrold's comedy last year at the Haymarket ?—we went in the gallery to see it.”

“Yes.”

“Time works wonders ’—and what wonders may the old chap with the scythe be preparing for you ! Time may work wonders in the cousin even, make her disgusted with her old lover, and anxious for a new one. She is very young, is she not ? ”

“Eighteen last February.”

“Too young to know her own mind, perhaps. Who's the happy being ? ”

I ground my teeth as I answered, “Heberdeen.”

“Young Heberdeen ! ” exclaimed Markingham ; “how the name turns up at odd corners to startle one ! Ah ! I suppose the engagement will end when he has risen to two or three hundred a-year—why, Woodleigh, there's hope for you.”

“Hope ! ” I said with a sneer.

“There's always danger in a long engagement ; years are slow lovers' marches, and the lady must be very constant, and the gentleman uncommonly devoted and patient, to keep the true lover's knot from becoming entangled. Does——”

“Don't ask me any more questions, Mr. Markingham,” said I, jumping up in a passion ; “I am sick of them ; my head aches and my brain whirls. Good-night !—I am going to my room.”

"Good-night. Think over all that I have said, and you will feel better in the morning. Stop, are you going up in the dark again?"

"Yes."

"I'll send——"

"Don't send anybody with a light to my room, or I'll kick him down stairs!"

I rushed to my chamber and locked myself in. Alone in the darkness, with the blind undrawn before the window, and the star-studded sky beyond. The scene, the time, the weight at my heart, put me in mind of the night before I ran away from home, when I sat, as now, in the darkness and brooded over the blank future. Then I was wondering what would become of me, and time was now answering the question. Four years, come next October, since I had sat and thought what a miserable being I was—four long years, and still with the same thoughts, the same uncertainty of the days to come, the same want of purpose and feeling of despair.

I threw up the window, leaned out, and looked at the fashionable houses in the square beyond, at the dark mass of house-roof, at the peaceful stars shimmering over all. From earthward to heavenward in one glance; from the troubles which the house-roof covers, to the holy canopy of heaven where no troubles can enter! In my country life at Nettleton, after my mother's marriage, I had more than once stolen out at night to the common, thrown myself on the dew-laden grass, and gazed up at the light from the far-away worlds. I don't know whether my sensations are peculiar to myself, but I have never looked in my solitude long and steadfastly at the stars without feeling my heart soften, and the rage therein melt away. It was so that night with me; the past habit conjured up the past memories, and all was so holy and peaceful above there, such a contrast to the day of turmoil I had spent—that day which had cut me adrift from old ties—that I could but turn a child again in my loneliness, and shed a few tears, boy-like, over the wreck of my first love!

CHAPTER V

LEAVE TAKINGS.

AFTER that night the thoughts of travel, of life abroad with Markingham, never left me. My restless spirit required a new world in which I might forget all that had passed in the old one.

I could not face my relations again; they would all know my story, and even if it still remained a secret, where would be the pleasure of seeing her I had lost, seeing her happy by the side of him whom she loved?

I could find no relief in the company of my step-father; even my mother's gentleness and affection made me irritable. I was discontented with my patron—my new father—and my friends, and there was no pleasure in the thought that my prospects were better than they had ever been in my life. I did not want to be a rich man's *protégé*; I did not care to be independent and earning my own living; I was callous and indifferent as regarded myself, as regarded my friends and acquaintances.

The thoughts of leaving England appeared to hold out these attractions, and when Mr. Markingham mentioned the idea again, I responded readily to the suggestion and said there was nothing I desired more.

So it was resolved on, and preparations were made for disposing of the town house and selling off the furniture and the carriage-and-pair.

"If we were not both rolling stones, destined never to rest and gather moss," said Markingham, "I should say there was a probability of our settling down in some decayed chateau, or near some romantic mountain-pass where brigands and village beauties abound. For will not France, Germany, Italy, Spain, anywhere, suit us better than England?—cross, grumbling old Albion, that has treated us so scurvily?"

"Oh! anywhere away from here!"

"We will shake off our sorrows and losses, and begin afresh in the new land, Woodleigh," said Markingham; "the change will do us good."

"You are well enough, Sir."

"I have a reason for leaving as well as yourself," replied

Markingham ; "there are troubles, and temptations, and everything that makes an ass of a man in my way here."

"In your way, Sir?"

"Yes, in mine."

Mr. Markingham did not further allude to his troubles, and I thought at that time he had especially invented them lest I should feel lonely on my journey.

When everything was arranged and it only wanted the signal to start, when I had *quite* made up my mind, I went, like an unfeeling fellow as I was, to break the news to my mother.

"Abroad!" cried my mother, her round eyes becoming rounder. "Oh! my dear Robert, are you going far?"

"I cannot tell the exact distance, mother," said I, "but I shall write very often. Why, how frightened you look at the idea of my going!"

"And for how long a time?" she asked, sinking into the nearest chair, and pressing her hands to her bosom.

"One or two years, I think," was my answer.

"My dear, dear boy," cried my mother, "it is easy for you to say one or two years, but one or two years to me—what a long, endless time it will be!"

"But, mother, we have been separated two years before."

"Alas! yes, but even then I knew where you were, what you were doing, who were your associates. Now I shall be in ignorance, and you may fall headlong into danger and temptation, and have no one to stay you. My dear Robert," entreated my mother, "wait till your father—that is, Mr. Bowden—returns, and hear what he has to say."

"Certainly I will wait," said I, graciously.

"One or two years!" again repeated my mother, "why, I may die before that time, and have no son at my side to receive my last blessing!"

"Oh! don't talk like that, mother. It's making you and me miserable, for no purpose."

"What may happen in two years, my dear boy! what changes, what losses, may fall to the lot of us all! I am sure that I have had very bad health lately—ever since I have been in London, in fact—my head has been alway aching, and Grook's by the dozen have not done it a mite of good. Oh! Robert, now I think of it, if nothing *will* turn you from going, don't forget to remind me of a nice parcel of Grook's."

"I have a box unopened, mother."

"But if you should run short of them in a wild outlandish country, where their weight in gold would not buy the receipt! There, I was sure you had not half considered the horrors of travelling!"

"And, my dear mother, you have not half considered the good travelling may do me, the man it will make of me. I shall come back with half-a-dozen languages on the tip of my tongue, with a knowledge of the world and of human nature, improved in my health and my manners."

My mother regarded me wistfully.

"Well," with a sigh that made my heart ache, "come back well in health again, and God knows I shall care little for your manners or accomplishments. I haven't complained much in my life, but, heigho! you have been a strange son to me."

"I know it," said I, mournfully; "but I have not loved you the less for being away from you. Something has always stood between us and kept us asunder, but I have never forgotten the name of my mother!"

My mother flew from her chair into my arms and kissed me. She rested her head on my shoulder—how short she seemed to have grown of late years!—and sobbed out:—

"Bless you for those kind words, Robert—it is pleasant to hear you talk like this after years of estrangement."

"Not estrangement, mother—don't call it that," I said, pressing her to me; "we have been together in thought and in heart all our lives."

"Then you *have* missed me?"

"Missed my confidant, to whom I told all my sorrows and found consolation! Oh! for the past to find that comfort again!"

My mother raised her head and looked at me earnestly. I could not meet her gaze—I turned away.

"Robert, you have something to tell me. Will you, for once more in life, only once more, confide in me? I am a simple woman, but I think I understand you better than anybody in the world—will you tell me this once?"

"What good will it do?—it is all over and gone!"

"Still I have a mother's interest—a mother's anxiety. Do tell me—it may be too late when you come back!"

"Well, then, for once more in life, mother, be the patient listener to my fretfulness—try to console me for my folly. You are the only one who will ever give me sympathy!"

We sat down side by side, mother and son, her hand clasping mine.

I told her briefly the story of my love, my offer to Constance, its rejection, and the blank in my life that it seemed to have left. What a relief it was to pour my sorrows into that faithful bosom ; to meet with no satire, no reproof, no worldly counsel, only a woman's tenderness and tears. How like the dear old times, before Mr. Bowden stepped between us !

When my mother had dried her eyes, she endeavoured to console me—she bridled up too, like a true mother.

"To reject *you*, my dear Robert—you are worth a dozen of such chits of a girl. There will be plenty glad to set their caps at you, my handsome boy, and your only trouble in the future will be 'which shall I have?' To think *my* Robert," tossing her head indignantly, "was not good enough for my lady!"

"But, mother, you don't understand. It was all my own fault ; I had had no encouragement."

"That has nothing to do with it," said my mother, decisively.

"And she was in love with somebody else—does that make a difference?"

"Well, that does a little. But," looking at me affectionately, "I wonder she had the heart to say 'No'—you are such a fine young fellow, nearly six feet high, I'm sure."

I laughed. It was my first laugh since my disappointment, and quite surprised me. I felt lighter in heart, too, since my confession ; the world did not seem half as gloomy.

A little more of my mother and a little less of Mr. Markingham, what a deal of good it might have done me !

"And now, mother, how long will Mr. Bowden be?"

"I expected him back before this, but his responsibility is great now, and he has so large a flock to attend to, that there is no guessing his time."

My mother gave another heavy sigh as she added :—

"Sometimes I regret the exchange of Nettleton for London—the quiet little chapel on the hill, and our scanty flock therein, for the great building and the large congregation. I don't like people to talk so much of my simple-hearted husband, to invent all manner of ridiculous stories concerning him, and to tumble one over the other into chapel, full of curiosity and empty of reverence."

"It is the fate of being popular. Mr. Bowden will not trouble himself about those inconveniences if he find his sphere of usefulness widening."

"I am glad to hear you speak well of him, Robert," said my mother with glistening eyes; "you understand him now, dear."

"I believe so."

"It surprises me to think anyone could disagree with him—I am sure I have not exchanged a cross word with him since our marriage."

"Yours is a gentle nature; had it been a firm one, you would have told a different story, perhaps. But you are looking grave, and we will change the subject."

"I was thinking of his daughter Amelia, whom he has gone to see to-day."

"To see his daughter!—at my uncle's house?"

"Yes; he has not seen her since that day they met at your lodgings, and he is very anxious concerning her. During that interview she told him with whom she was residing, and to-day he has made up his mind to call at Grove House."

"I fear Miss Bowden will object to that."

"Object to a father's visit—how unnatural!"

"She is a strange girl."

"Yes, and yet a good one; obedient and yet disobedient. I think, my dear Robert, I'll tell you the story of the quarrel, before Mr. Bowden returns."

But the little mystery that enshrouded father and daughter was not destined to be dispersed that day—Mr. Bowden's well-known rapping sounded on the outer door before my mother had commenced the first half-dozen words of her tale.

There was a new hat on the back of his head this time, and his clothes, though they did not fit him—Stultz himself would have despaired of fitting that angular frame—were no longer white in the seams and shiny at the knees and elbows.

"Ah! Robert, I hope I see you well."

"Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Bowden."

"Jacob!" exclaimed my mother, after Mr. Bowden had shaken hands with me in an absent manner, "is anything the matter?"

Mr. Bowden, forgetting to remove his hat, sat down and looked at the carpet.

"Yes, my dear," he answered at last, "something is the matter—seriously the matter."

"Good gracious!"

"My daughter's gone away from the Woodleighs—gone no one knows where."

"For what reason?" asked my mother.

"I don't know—they don't know," replied my step-father with a groan; "she left this letter behind her; will you be good enough, Robert, to read it to your mother?"

Very much surprised, I took the little note which Mr. Bowden extended to me, opened it, and read aloud as follows:—

"No longer content, I have resolved to leave you suddenly, thereby avoiding the pain of formal leave-taking and the embarrassment of asking and *declining* explanations. For your past kindness believe me ever grateful. Don't let little Mary too soon forget

"AMELIA BOWDEN."

"What does it all mean?" exclaimed my mother; "is she ill?—has she received an affront?—does Mrs. Woodleigh know anything more?"

"Nothing more," said Mr. Bowden; "they are as perplexed and concerned as I am. She has gone in the same strange way in which she left my home, seeming not to care what trouble and anxiety remain. "Well," looking very stern, "the unhappy girl chooses her own path in life, rashly defying the dangers which beset the wilful and weak. Strong in her selfishness, heedless of advice, she throws aside her love for friends and father, and seeks her way alone. Surely there must come a day for repentance of this madness!"

"We do not know her reasons, Jacob," pleaded my mother, gently.

"Mrs. Bowden," said he, "from this day I have done with her. She has neglected me through life——"

"For your own happiness, she said, Sir," I interrupted

Mr. Bowden turned round indignantly.

"What did she know about that?" he exclaimed, in his old, fierce tones; "if she had obeyed me—a child's duty ever!—I should have been a happy man. God knows I loved her well enough, Sir, and if she had been a dutiful child she would have shown her love in return by trusting in her father. But she was hard to melt as granite, and the more severe I became, the less she bowed to my will."

Was Mr. Bowden's severity the best antidote for stubbornness of temper, I thought; had it not been the great mistake of his life? Were there not times when, with all his goodness and Bible practice, he was as hard as granite himself?

—when the “my will” was a law which it was the greatest of sins to disobey? Trace to the fountain-head my own cares and trials, and was not he in some degree answerable for them as well as for his daughter’s?

I thought this as I watched him rise and pace the room; but it was not my place to preach, and it was his profession.

“Let her go for ever,” he said coldly, “and let me turn to those who have confidence in me, and forget that such a daughter lived. Yet,” he said, pausing, “when I saw her last—met her after so many years’ separation, my heart melted like wax in the furnace. Poor unhappy girl!”

Mr. Bowden was not quite so hard as granite after all.

“If she had but come to me for counsel, I might have lightened her burden,” said he, beginning his walk again; “might have persuaded her to—persuaded *her*,” he repeated, turning stern again—“I’m talking like a madman!”

Mr. Bowden was so full of his griefs, and so out of temper that morning, that I rose with the intention of retiring. But my mother was not anxious to part with me—there was a long farewell coming, and she wished to make the most of her boy while she had him.

“Robert, dear, you are not going yet!”

“I am rather pressed for time, mother—have other calls to make.”

“But you have not told Mr. Bowden.”

“Told me what, Robert?” asked Mr. Bowden, stopping a second time.

“Of my intention to leave England for a few years, Sir,” I said; “but it will be better to leave the particulars to my mother—you appear too disturbed now to pay attention to so unimportant a matter.”

“Unimportant to *me*, you mean?”

“Why—yes.”

“What is of interest to your mother is always of importance to me, Robert,” he answered; “but such a statement as yours is something more to us both, and I am very sorry to hear it.”

“Sorry, Sir?”

“You go with Mr. Markingham?”

“Yes.”

“You go with no object but pleasure?”

“I don’t anticipate a great degree of pleasure, Mr. Bowden.”

“You have no reason for going—no business to occupy your mind and keep you steady?”

"No business,—certainly."

I was nearly saying "unfortunately," but it would have led to many painful questions—perhaps have brought on a still more painful sermon.

"Then I am sorry to hear it; you are not fit for a gentleman, Robert. When there is no object in view, your bad tempers are in the ascendant, and Mr. Markingham will soon be tired of attempting to restrain them. You would be much happier, boy, in a lower sphere, working your own way in the world, and indebted to no one."

The remark nettled me, although I believed it. I had had the same thoughts myself, and it was galling to find them repeated by him.

"You will scarcely believe it, Robert, but I was bad-tempered and stubborn in my youth—very fond of my own way."

I could believe that, although I tried to assume a mild air of surprise.

"And if I had had the chance of being a gentleman and grasped greedily at it, I should have been ruined for life; but I had a great deal of hardship to endure, and it made me earnest in my work, and kept the evil thoughts away."

"I grasped *greedily* at my chance of being a gentleman," said I; "but I hope I shan't be ruined for life, for all that."

"Self-confidence—self-confidence," replied my step-father, "the cause of half the sorrow in the world. Your reigning fault—my daughter's!"

Mr. Bowden did not dwell on the subject of my travels, and I considered myself a lucky being to escape without a hundred rules for my guidance. But I did not escape them—they were only reserved for my next visit, when Mr. Bowden was just in the humour for a long-winded discourse.

But time went on, despite warnings and sermons; the house was disposed of; the furniture and the carriage-and-pair went to the hammer; Mr. Markingham transacted business with his broker, had a private interview with his solicitor, and then we were ready to depart.

There were a few farewells to take. I could not go away without a word to old friends. I did not go to Grove House, however—I dared not face them there—but the day before my departure I walked to Edgware Road, through the well-known warehouse gates, along the paved yard into the counting-house. I had never felt such an affection for a counting-house before!

"Come in," cried Upton's voice in answer to my summons.

I entered. Upton was at his desk, and two clerks were writing busily at the window, one at my old post before the ledger.

"What, Robert, old fellow!" cried Upton in his heartiest manner—the old manner, before the quarrels in Richmond Park, "how are you? I am very glad to see you."

He left his desk, passed his arm through mine, and walked me quickly into the yard.

"So you are not going to throw us overboard again, Robert? I thought you were."

"No, Upton. It will always be a pleasure to see you and—the rest of my cousins, although that pleasure must be given up for a time."

"Oh! nonsense. Now all is explained and settled about Con—that last affair, you know, you are the cousin and the friend of the family again."

"The pleasure is not to be given up for that reason, Upton," said I, blushing; "but the truth is that I am going abroad with Mr. Markingham, and I cannot start without at least bidding *you* good-bye, and desiring to be remembered to the rest."

"Abroad?"

"Yes, for some years."

"The deuce!" ejaculated Upton. "Well, I am sorry to hear it. Some years, too—how many?"

"Two or three."

"Well, it's a fine thing to be a gentleman, and take these long holidays," said Upton. "I hope you will enjoy yourself, Robert."

"Thank you."

"You'll bring a foreign wife home with you," said Upton, "an olive-tinted beauty, black eyes and hair, and all that sort of thing."

"I shall never marry, Upton," said I, firmly.

"Ha! ha! never marry," laughed Upton, "that's a good joke. Why, you are one of those chaps who will always be falling in and out of love, like my brother Dick."

"Is he of so variable a nature?"

"He was, before his engagement to Miss Heberdeen."

"I remember one young lady to whom Richard Woodleigh was very attentive."

"What young lady?" asked Upton, quickly.

"Miss Bowden. Have you heard from her lately?"

"Dick attentive to Miss Bowden!" cried Upton, "what do you mean by that? Miss Bowden never thought of him, or he of her. They were not fit for each other in any respect. Whatever made you think of such a thing?"

"I have seen Dick teasing her, and, I think, at times, flirting with her," I replied.

"I never saw her flirting in my life!" cried Upton.

"Well, perhaps it was my fancy—I did not observe her or Richard Woodleigh very closely."

"I don't think you did."

Upton gave his characteristic shake of the head, and paused a little before he turned to me and asked:—

"If I or my step-father had learned any news of her?"

"Not any," was my reply.

"Was there ever an impetuous girl like her, I wonder?" said Upton; "what mystery led her to so hastily desert us? Can she be quite right in the head, Robert?"

"Quite."

"We did not know that her father had married our aunt till Mr. Bowden called a few days ago," said Upton. "I suppose she had a reason for that, too; I hate all this mystery—it's not business-like—it aggravates me. There is no getting her out of my thoughts, and that aggravates me more. If you should hear anything concerning her—you may hear from Mr. Bowden—you'll let me—ahem!—mother know. We are all anxious. You see she was with us so long!"

"So I have heard."

"Perhaps she has gone abroad—you may meet her in your travels, Robert."

A little more talk concerning Miss Bowden, in whom Upton seemed particularly interested, and then I shook hands and bade him farewell.

"We shan't know you when you return, Robert."

"Shall I know all at Grove House? What changes will occur there—marriages and giving in marriage—before I set foot again in its rooms?"

"You will find us all enjoying the luxury of single blessedness."

"All?"

"I think so. There is only one sister engaged, and the day is far distant when she changes her home and her name. She is very young, and we are in no hurry to get rid of her. Good-bye, Robert. Prosperity attend you!"

"The same to Upton Woodleigh. Remembrances to my uncle and—and cousins. Good-bye!"

And, low-spirited and gloomy, I went on my way unrejoicing.

There was another old friend to take leave of—Tom Arrow, late of Nettleton. Tom Arrow gave way immoderately at the news. He ran about his apartments, banged the doors, kicked the chairs about, and finally ended by sitting on the table and pulling his hair vigorously.

"For two years, Bob?—what an infernal time to be dodging about foreign countries, going up and down mountains, and looking through telescopes! I wish I were going—I wish I were you, Bob."

"You would soon wish yourself back in the old skin, Arrow."

"What, this little skin, Bob?—after I had been stretched six feet one, and had whiskers all over my face—after I had been a gentleman, the heir to the house of Markingham, &c., &c.?"

"After you had inherited all my bad temper, lost your lightness of heart,—those spirits that nothing can damp,—and become the sour, cross-grained, morbid dog that I am!"

"To be sure. What should I care? I say, Bob, I have a good mind to be dangerously ill for the next six months and get some medical gentleman to recommend me a warmer climate. Do I look consumptive?"

"Don't neglect your chances in life for my sake," said I; "that would be folly."

"Oh! hang the folly of it—I shouldn't mind that, if it weren't for the money. I have run rather short in that particular, and mean for a little while to steer clear of the Jews—confound them!"

"Can I be of any assistance?"

"Oh, no. It's all right; I can get money when I want it. I'm not hard up, only I don't want to owe all the old lady's money before the executors hand it over and wish me joy—that would be rather awkward."

Time passed away speedily in Tom Arrow's society. Tom was anxious to wind up the evening at a theatre, the opera, public gardens, anywhere—but there was another leave-taking to go through, and duty, even inclination, demanded that it should not be a short one. So I bade adieu to Tom Arrow, and Tom Arrow's fat cheeks were covered with tears as he let me out of the front door and cried:—

"God bless you, Bob!—take care of yourself."

Of the next parting—the last—let me pass over briefly. It was a hard task to get free from the fond arms of the mother, to struggle from home and take wing!

Should it not always be a hard task to leave the mother's arms for the world—the tried for the untried? I had made the venture once, and now it seemed beginning life afresh and leaving the mother again.

Beginning life afresh!—but not with youth's hopes, wishes, aspirations—no thought for myself, no care for the future.

END OF THE FIFTH BOOK.

BOOK VI.

NAPLES IN '48.

"ITALIA ! oh, Italia ! thou who hast
The fatal gift of beauty, which became
A funeral dower of present woes and past,
On thy sweet brow is sorrow plough'd by shame,
And annals graved in characters of flame."
BYRON.

"Oh, Sir ! the good die first,
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket."
WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

ABROAD.

MR. MARKINGHAM was right—one does not give up to despair at nineteen years of age, no matter the bitterness of the disappointment. Nineteen soon patches up the wounds at its heart and gives over apostrophising the stars ; romance loses its morbid charms, and reality comes in for a fair share of favour.

Not that I forgot Constance Woodleigh—my memory was a retentive one, and I could not wholly chase from my thoughts the sunny-faced cousin who had said No to my love suit. Had I met her in the foreign lands through which I journeyed with Markingham, doubtless the old follies would have started again to the light to unnerve me, for there were times, even in the midst of the excitement of travel, when I felt the most miserable being that ever cumbered the surface of earth.

Those times became few and far between, and it is hardly just to ascribe them to my heart complaint ; for was not the indolent, aimless nature of my life more answerable for them ?

Travel, though it improved my health, and dissipated to a certain extent my morbidity, did not render me more content, and Miss Bowden seemed right in her prophecy that I should never make a happy man.

Was I on the right road to happiness?—were an easy friend, a full purse, and my own way in everything, better than hard work at the books with a task-master over me? Is it well for any one with warm blood in his veins to sit by the wayside and hold aloof from the workers?—nay, is not stone-breaking on the king's highway a more noble employment?

Seventeen months of incessant travelling, despite the wonders one meets with, are wearisome work, unless the traveller be blessed with a "Mission."

At the end of that period I was secretly and heartily tired of foreign cities, faces, and languages, and experienced more fatigue than pleasure in the study of them.

We did not gallop over the continent, and then helter-skelter back to England in time for the next publishing season and our new book of travels ; we had time and money to get rid of, and

went slowly from capital to capital in a very un-English manner.

During seventeen months I received little news from those I had left behind ; a mother's letter now and then was all that reached my hand to remind me of England. There was no news of my uncle or his family in her letters ; my mother kept away from Paddington, and knew nothing concerning her first husband's kinsfolk. Her letters were full of Mr. Bowden, of the progress he was making in public estimation, and of the excellent man he was in every sense of the word.

In her last letter my mother communicated some tidings of Miss Bowden ; a letter had been received by my step-father from that eccentric young lady—a brief, abrupt epistle, stating that she was well, and that there was no occasion for anxiety on her account ; it entered into no explanation of her reasons for leaving the Woodleighs, and made no mention of her present place of residence, but left all in the clouds as before.

At the end of my seventeen months' pilgrimage I was still far distant from England, sunning myself under a southern sky in the kingdom of Naples—false, glittering kingdom, beneath whose scales is the serpent ; brightest of emeralds in a sapphire sea—"Fragment of heaven dropped on earth,"—"Paradise seen from hell !"

We reached Naples at an inauspicious time. It was the beginning of December, 1847, when the seeds of a hundred revolutions had been committed to the earth, and the spirit of resistance was slowly gathering strength. Discontent was hovering over many a fair city ; the two great classes, the powerful and powerless, were drifting separate ways, and the deep mutterings of the storms of '48 were audible.

We found Naples, under the amiable rule of Ferdinand the Gentle, a trifle more disturbed than other lands, the pressure of the hand upon the throat of the nation leaving a darker mark. Naples is at all times an excitable city, and in December, 1847, it needed no keen observer to guess the eve of an explosion. Never did the restless mountain which crowns that kingdom give surer signs of danger.

There was too much whispering round the fountains and in the market-places, on the quays and before the palace gates, too much angry discussion of politics between people naturally light-hearted enough to care for nothing but their pleasures, their lottery chances, and a few carlini. Conspirators were busy, and spies were everywhere ; secret clubs were organised

and broken up ; prisons were full of innocent and guilty—they were not particular in Naples!—arrests were made at every hour of the day, of foreigners, natives, rich men, and lazzaroni ; ministers lumbering by in their carriages were pointed out and menaced ; the shadow of coming events was cast upon the city.

Still business went on as usual, and the streets of Naples were full of life and bustle. One or two nervous travellers left the city, but the majority of visitors remained, Mr. Markingham and I amongst the number.

"Naples will last our time, Woodleigh," commented Mr. Markingham ; "the hour is not ripe for the tricolour and the barricades—we'll spend Christmas with the Neapolitans."

"With all my heart, Sir," was my answer ; "and if there's a disturbance, why, there will be a chance of engaging in it."

"On the king's side or the people's ?"

"The people's, to be sure."

"A dangerous side to choose in a city where the people don't know their own minds two minutes together. Are you becoming tired of this kind of life that you want excitement ?"

"I should like something to do !"

"You were not made for a gentleman, Woodleigh ; you don't take the fortunes of life philosophically."

We were strolling down the famous Toledo, observing the activity and excitement of Neapolitan life. The carriages were slowly moving in the roadway, the crowds of vendors of everything eatable and uneatable were making the air ring with their clamour, gaily-clad soldiers, monks, peasant girls from distant villages, in costumes which one never sees off the stage in England, legions of beggars with every complaint under the sun, improvisadores, dancers, and nuns were jostling together. But it is an old subject, this Toledo, and I will not weary the reader with a threadbare description of what every tourist has, in these universal travelling days, seen for himself. To my story, for I have not brought the reader so long a distance from home for nothing.

Mr. Markingham and I were retracing our steps down the Toledo towards our hotel on the Chiaia, threading our way through a maze of figures in an every-day carnival, when we came upon three persons whose attire and whose interest in the lively scene through which they passed betokened them visitors like ourselves.

Mr. Markingham caught me by the arm.

"Are we dreaming, Woodleigh, or are well-known faces to

follow us to Naples and remind us of the land we have deserted ? See ! ”

There were two gentlemen and an English lady. The lady was leaning on the arm of the younger man—a tall and very handsome man, whom to see once was to bear a long while in remembrance, one whom I had imagined at college, working hard for his degree, Cousin Dick Woodleigh.

He was better looking than ever—he had exchanged the English hat for a rakish-looking velvet cap with a red tassel, and his complexion, a little browned by an Italian sun, showed him off to advantage. He seemed on very good terms with himself, as usual, and was caressing his left whisker with a pink-gloved hand in an affectionate manner. His companions were the late Squire Heberdeen and daughter—the Squire the model of an English gentleman ; the daughter, beautiful but pale.

As they advanced, Markingham muttered:

“ Who is the simpering Narcissus with Harriet Heberdeen, I wonder ? ”

“ Richard Woodleigh, a cousin of mine, Sir.”

“ So, so,” said Markingham ; “ a cousin of yours, and a friend of the Heberdeens ; travelling with them too—it looks suspicious. Is he engaged to Miss Heberdeen ? ”

“ I have heard so,” was my answer.

We were face-to-face at last, and Miss Heberdeen was the first to recognise us, and direct the attention of her companions towards us. Squire Heberdeen started when he found Mr. Markingham close at his side, and Dick’s eyes opened to a considerable extent at my unlooked-for appearance on the Strada di Toledo.

The meeting was far from a frigid one. Richard Woodleigh shook hands with me heartily, and Squire Heberdeen imitated his example with an old friend and late adversary.

“ Markingham ! Mr. Woodleigh ! ” cried he ; “ it is pleasant to meet with a face one knows in these outlandish parts. I hope you are well.”

“ Very well, thank you,” answered Markingham ; “ may I trust Miss Heberdeen is the same ? ”

Miss Heberdeen, with whom I had been exchanging civilities, replied :—

“ I am better than I have been, Mr. Markingham, thank you.”

“ Have you been ill then ? ” he asked anxiously.

“ Too ill to remain in England, poor girl,” said the Squire ; “ for our physician has strongly recommended Italy.”

"When Hastings, or the west of England, would have been equally beneficial," added Miss Heberdeen, with a smile.

"Doctor Barland said Italy, and Italy it is," said the Squire, half angrily. "Naples before Hastings; health before economy. I would spend my last penny to see the roses on your cheeks again, my girl!"

"They are left behind at Nettleton," she answered.

"We will find them again in Naples, girl; Italian roses blooming at Christmas. But we are very remiss in our introductions—Mr. Markingham, Mr. Richard Woodleigh."

Hat and velvet cap courteously raised, smiles exchanged, two keen grey eyes looking into two brown ones.

"Delighted to make the acquaintance of Mr. Woodleigh," said Markingham.

Richard Woodleigh bowed, and asserted that the pleasure was mutual.

"Your son is not in Naples?" said Markingham, turning to the Squire.

"I should be sorry to see him idling his time here, now he has his own fortune to make; and I am sure he would be sorry to waste time himself. Markingham," said the Squire, his eyes glistening, "you would not believe the change that has come to my boy—how he improves, what a dear son he is to me, what energy and resolution there are in him! He has only one enemy in his nature to fight against; a proud and hasty temper—and he will conquer that soon. Rome was not built in a day."

"A hasty temper!" remarked Markingham; "that must be a trial to its possessor—eh, Robert?" wheeling round to me.

"A great trial," said I, repaying Mr. Markingham with a scowl for his pointed allusion.

"These paths were not made for loiterers," affirmed the Squire, as two Neapolitans, with a huge basket between them, nearly bore him into the roadway; "and His Majesty of the Two Sicilies may suspect treason in our conversation."

"If you are not engaged to-day, Heberdeen," said Markingham, "it would be a great pleasure to meet you at my hotel."

Heberdeen shook his head.

"No, no," said he, with a laugh that had a little sadness in it; "I cannot sit at my adversary's table yet, even in Naples, where an English foe is better than an Italian friend. Has not the past for ever separated us?"

"I thought so once," replied Markingham; "but time has

taught me that we should not carry our enmity through life with us."

"Well, I bear no enmity," said the Squire, "why should I? I was in possession of your property, and you had a right to take it from me, *sans doute*."

"Then ——" began Markingham.

"Some other time," interrupted the Squire, "we will discuss the question. Have you been long in Naples?"

"About a week."

"Strange that we have not met before," said Heberdeen; "and yet"—correcting himself—"not very strange, our hotels being as wide asunder as the poles. You are at the Vittoria, I presume?"

"Yes."

"Ah! we cannot afford the Chiaia and the Bay of Naples, nowadays; we are content with more humble quarters in—no matter."

"We shall meet again," said Markingham. "Fate throws us together, and Montague and Capulet may as well sheathe the sword for ever."

"There is little reason against it," murmured the Squire.

"For the present, then, adieu," said Markingham, raising his hat; "farewell, Miss Heberdeen; the sooner the roses return, the better pleased will be an old—the oldest friend of the family! Mr. Woodleigh, will you favour us, at your leisure, with a call?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Markingham."

Exchange of salutations, and then the Heberdeens and Cousin Dick went their way, and Mr. Markingham stood by my side and looked after them in an absent manner.

"It is singular," he murmured, when we had resumed our walk.

"What is singular?"

"This yearning of mine to cry peace to my enemy. Is it his misfortune that has softened my heart and drawn the sting from my tongue, cancelled the bitter memories, and awakened those that are purer and better? It is very strange."

"The sight of an English face in this mob of burnt skins, of English composure amidst Neapolitan restlessness, is a change and a relief."

"You could not have brightened up more at the sight of your cousin, had he been the favourite one, Woodleigh," said Markingham. "He is a fine young fellow, yet——"

"Yet?" I repeated.

"Yet, there is something I don't like in his face—perhaps it's his good looks, for we men of forty-four don't admire handsome young men any more than an old maid falls into ecstasies over a beauty in the flush of her first season. But I shall see more of him—that is, if he will give me the chance."

Richard Woodleigh soon gave Mr. Markingham the chance he desired. The following evening he strolled into the Vittoria as if that hotel belonged to him, and was duly ushered into the drawing-room of Signor Markingham. Richard Woodleigh was soon at home with Mr. Markingham; he had great conversational powers, and Mr. Markingham did his best that night to bring them into play. They talked of college-life, of Neapolitan politics, of any topic that came uppermost, and it struck me, as I sat observing them, and taking little share in the conversation, that Richard Woodleigh was as anxious to study Stephen Markingham as that gentleman was to observe Richard Woodleigh. At all events, both gentlemen appeared to be on their guard, and fencing carefully over their wine.

When my cousin had gone, Markingham said to me:—

"I don't like him, Woodleigh."

"Yet you have seen him to advantage, Sir. He was certainly in one of his most amiable moods."

"Possibly; but the false glitter has not dazzled my understanding, as it has—Miss Heberdeen's."

Richard Woodleigh did not give me his opinion of Mr. Markingham when I met him in the Riviera de Chiaia the following day. Was it by accident he was strolling near the Vittoria at so early an hour?—he who was never an early riser.

"Ah! Robert," said he, shaking me by both hands in his delight at seeing me; "glad to meet you, cousin. I say, what a giant you have grown lately!"

"You forget it is an age since I left England, Richard—a growing age."

"True. Are you for a stroll in the Villa Reale?"

"With pleasure."

We sauntered into the aristocratic gardens of the Villa Reale, Dick Woodleigh's arm passed through mine in a brotherly manner.

"You are a lucky fellow, Robert Woodleigh," said he; "one in a hundred thousand, to meet with a rich patron early in life—a patron with no friends or relations. Mr. Markingham came in for the lion's share of the Heberdeen money, did he not?"

"The greater portion, I believe."

"Is there not a doubt of his retaining it, Robert—talk of another will or something?"

"I have not heard so."

"Young Heberdeen often regrets his want of funds to continue the battle—talks of counsel's advice, and a hundred things; but the old Squire shakes his head, and will not be troubled any more with the law. How do you like Naples?"

"Well enough," was my answer; "it is a spirited place—plenty of animation to keep the blue devils away. How is it that Richard Woodleigh is indulging in so long a leave of absence?"

"From home, or college, do you mean?"

"College."

His eyebrows lowered over his fine eyes as he answered moodily:—

"Necessity keeps me from college, inclination from home."

"I do not understand you."

"Bob Woodleigh, you are an old friend; we have always been attached to one another," said he, pressing my arm warmly. "I will tell you all."

Considerably astonished at this confession of my cousin's attachment, I waited for his revelation.

"Robert," he began, the dark expression on his countenance predominant, "it may be a pleasant thing for a tradesman to become rich, but it is a bad thing for his children. The children belong to no class, the well-born look down upon them, and they dare not mix with the dregs from which sprung the father. But there is a something worse than that in the father himself—for, with all his riches, there never departs from him the sordid notions of the huckster. With thousands at his banker's, he will struggle for a sixpence, and begrudge every pound he gives away."

"You are not speaking from experience, Richard?"

"Yes, I am," he cried sharply; "I am speaking of my father, who has disgraced me—whom I never wish to see again!"

"Why?—what has happened at home? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Nothing right. The truth is, I got into debt at college—ran up a few bills, perhaps was a trifle more extravagant than the majority, knowing my expectations. I don't disguise it from you, Robert, I was extravagant, *there*! Well, somehow it came to the governor's ears, and what do you think he did?"

"Paid your bills?"

"Damned if he did," cried Dick; "instead of settling the accounts and starting me afresh—it would not have affected his pocket much—he went down to Oxford, found out every tradesman to whom I owed a few pounds, looked at every bill with the eye of a miser, said that it was an extortion and a swindle, and he would see me arrested before he paid one half of my debts."

"And how did it end?"

"By my creditors coming to some infernal arrangement or other, which made me ridiculous in the eyes of society. Fancy my father coming down to Oxford, haggling like an old Jew, and making me the talk of the place for weeks. But that wasn't all; after he had settled the bills—it didn't cost him two thousand pounds altogether—he turned upon me, said he had been deceived in me, that I was a spendthrift and a profligate, had no principle in me, and was no more fit for the Church than he was. He wanted to cut down my allowance—and as we are both excitable temperaments we had a few words, in which Upton must join, to be sure, and take his father's part. We didn't get on any better for *his* interference, and so it ended in my threatening to go abroad, and—keeping my threat, too."

"And your mother?"

"Oh! she was cut up of course—they didn't care about making her ill in their selfishness—I believe, Robert, they really wanted to get rid of me!"

"But you came to some arrangement before you left?"

"I was not foolish enough to leave without a little understanding concerning money matters," he replied; "but he screwed me down, of course—it would not have been the governor if he had not! Screwed me down so that I am often compelled to ask the loan of a few pounds on the strength of the next remittance—humiliating, is it not?"

"Very," said I.

"And as I have no friends in this volcanic region, I must look to you, Robert, when I am hard up—not that I am short of money at present, quite the contrary."

"I am sorry to hear that you have quarrelled with your father—what does Miss Heberdeen say?"

"I have just joined the Heberdeens in Naples, and there has not been time yet for any explanation. What do you think of my choice, Robert?"

"Miss Heberdeen, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Your choice says a great deal for your sense, your good taste."

"Good taste, undeniably, for there is not a prettier girl in the world," said he, with the first flash of enthusiasm he had, perhaps, ever exhibited; "but there are a great many people would question my sense. You see, she is not an heiress now; she had better chances when I was first engaged to her."

"Do you regret your engagement, then?"

"No," he answered, "or I should have taken her at her word when she offered to cancel it after the Markingham victory. I liked the girl too much for that, and," with a yawn, "as it would have broken her heart to give me up, I kept to the engagement. Harriet Heberdeen is the only one who cares for me in the world, the only one who puts up with my bad temper, sees virtues in my vices, and forgives all my follies. Never was a girl more romantic or more loving. She won't see a fault in me; isn't that capital?"

"She will make the best of wives," said I, thinking at the same time that he would make the worst of husbands.

"She is one of the simplest little beauties that was ever born," said Dick; "she knows nothing of the world, and believes everything is good in it. As for me—I am a hero in her estimation, and she will never lose faith in the idol she worships."

"I hope that she never will."

"That's her one fault, Robert, too much gentleness. If she had some of her brother's spirit I should love her all the more. We have not had one quarrel since our engagement, and when I have tried to tease her about my conquests I have always failed. I should like to see more fire in her nature, more opposition. I hate 'yes' to everything."

"You should have paid your attentions to Miss Bowden."

Dick started.

"What ever put Miss Bowden in your head?"

"You were speaking of a fiery nature."

"Ah! there was spirit in *her*, was there not? I wonder where she vanished! It was a ghost-like movement, and all the efforts of—the family," he added, after a pause, "could not discover a trace. If—but have you not had enough of the Villa Reale and this eternal Bay of Naples? If it would only change colour now and then, not be always of a bright staring blue, how much better it would be! Shall we start for Posilipo?"

"Are you not engaged this morning?"

"I don't remember making any special promise to the Heberdeens—the Squire won't miss me, and Harriet will be all the more glad to see me when I make my appearance. Posilipo be it."

I could not help thinking, as we left the Villa Reale, that Cousin Dick was not the most noble or considerate of mortals. I thought it was strange also that any one should make an idol of him, waste the best feelings of the heart on one whose first study was evidently himself. I did not know then the power of the man, the knowledge of human nature he possessed, the art of disguising his mind and sentiments when he felt inclined. He had never cared to hide his true character from me, selfish and worldly as it was, and I could but wonder where lay the charm which induced others to regard him with favour. His confidence of that morning, his talk of his home, of his future wife, of his own failings, was flattering to me, although it was a studied frankness. It would not have suited with his plans to have become suddenly all that was good.

For some reason he wished to make me his friend and companion, and if he overacted his part at the first attempt, and was a trifle too candid, he played his game more carefully when opportunity brought us together.

Whether he left his greatest spell to the last, I cannot say, but it was some days before he spoke of Constance—his favourite sister!—and won me for an attentive listener.

"It was a surprise to me, that engagement with young Heberdeen," he remarked one day, "and I cannot fancy now that she likes him in her heart. Do you think they will ever be married?"

"What is to hinder a marriage between them?" I asked eagerly.

"Ned Heberdeen is fond of his own way—is of a jealous, overbearing nature, and is still as proud as Lucifer. Constance is a girl of quick perceptions, and will soon see what a miserable life lies before her. There will be a quarrel—mark my words."

"A lovers' quarrel is soon over."

"Not when the lover is Ned Heberdeen, who would rather die than give in or be gracious. I should be sorry to see Constance his wife, although Heberdeen is a dear friend of mine. Ah! Constance is the best of the Woodleighs, pity that she's so romantic."

"Romantic," repeated I.

Dick laughed.

"Romantic enough to nearly fall in love with her Cousin Robert once upon a time."

"This is very foolish jesting, Richard."

"I'm not jesting, Robert," answered my cousin; "I assure you there were more eyes than mine keeping watch over you both, lest you should make a runaway match of it."

"I never told a living soul of my attachment to your sister when I was your father's clerk."

"More than one guessed it though, and set their wits to work to hinder a probable folly—for it would have been a folly *then*."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Caroline was too quick for you," said Dick, "and was artful enough to reason Constance out of her sentimentalism. Ah! Caroline Woodleigh is too cunning for this world; she has upset more plans than one of mine, and I haven't forgiven her yet."

"Then—then Constance did really *once* think of me! You are sure of that, you say?"

"But a new lover has stepped into the field, and, woman-like, the old love is forgotten. Besides," said he, "you are a rich man, and can make a better match. You are not foolish enough to think anything of her now?"

"Oh! no—of course not."

"First-love never comes to anything—it's all moonshine."

After that day Richard Woodleigh and I were the best of friends—inseparables. What a frank, dashing fellow he suddenly became! impetuous at times, as most men are—vain, as all men are, who have any good looks to boast of—but a straightforward, plain-spoken friend. He was nearer my own age than Markingham—was it not natural that I should prefer his company to that of the philosopher? Besides, was he not the brother of Constance? and had he not told me a secret which set my heart almost beating again for the unattainable?

CHAPTER II.

BAD NEWS.

TIME, which passed on and strengthened the intimacy between me and Dick Woodleigh, did not renew the past friendship between Markingham and the late Squire of Netleton.

Mr. Heberdeen did not readily respond to Markingham's offer of friendship, and although there were times when his pride strangely softened, yet there were also moments when he turned away with a coldness that brought the flush to the face of my patron.

Nevertheless, Markingham persisted ;—"that strange yearning" to be friends with his old rival died not for want of encouragement—he kept his ground, and sought out the Squire as anxiously at times as I sought out my cousin.

Thrown together in a foreign land, we had many opportunities of meeting the Heberdeens, and the Squire could not always turn from us with a nod and "good-day." Mr. Markingham took also an interest in the engagement between Miss Heberdeen and Richard Woodleigh, and the lovers were never long together without Markingham's eyes sharply regarding them. He made a study of them, and hardly a look escaped him. Dick Woodleigh was right—he was certainly a hero in Harriet Heberdeen's estimation, an idol which she worshipped. And Dick at that time probably loved her as well as he could love anybody except himself, for such a love as hers would have softened the heart of a stoic.

In her sight, at her side, meeting the fond glances from eyes which knew no disguise, he was a different being, and might well have deceived an artless girl like Miss Heberdeen—and yet what a coward and a traitor he was !

As I write this, knowing him so well now, knowing more of his heart, and its baseness, than is yet laid bare to the reader, the blood warms in my veins, and my pulse beats the faster. He deceived Miss Heberdeen, and at her side, I believe, he deluded himself. There are some men with more lives than one, and some whose real life is known but to Him whose hand formed them.

Mr. Markingham's distrust of my cousin slowly increased. Richard Woodleigh's show of virtues did not mislead the man of the world.

"The more I see of your cousin, the more I suspect him," said Markingham; "and I would warn you, Woodleigh, to be on your guard."

"On guard—against what?"

"That puzzles me at present," said Markingham; "still, I say again, *prenez garde*! He is an accomplished man, a showy talker, and a dangerous friend."

"When he drops the mask, it will be time to drop him."

"The mask does not fall suddenly from the face of the tempter. However, follow your own way. You are the best judge of your friends and your enemies, and are not the only one dazzled by Richard Woodleigh's perfections."

"You should warn Miss Heberdeen, Sir."

"My suspicions are but shadows, and I would not needlessly alarm her," said Markingham; "time enough *for her* when the reality comes; I shall be on the watch. She, the child of the only woman I ever loved, shall marry some one deserving her."

Mr. Markingham marched out of the room, and I saw him no more till my return with Dick Woodleigh from the lottery in the Castel Capuano.

Time went on. There came a day when the hearts of most Englishmen soften, and Squire Heberdeen's pride unbent sufficiently to accept Markingham's invitation for himself and daughter to dinner on Christmas-day, 1847

It was a memorable day, for the same five persons never again met together to wish each other Merry Christmas.

Squire Heberdeen and Markingham talked a great deal of old times, and forgot, for a day, their differences over their wine.

It was a pleasant task for me to watch the courteous attention of Markingham to Miss Heberdeen, and try to reconcile that polished beau and thorough gentleman of four and forty with the slipshod personage who used to wear faded baize dressing-gowns, and philosophise over his poverty. Miss Heberdeen, to whose fair cheeks the roses, true to her father's prophecy, had returned, looked happy enough by the side of her betrothed; and Dick, though he yawned a great deal during the evening, seemed to enjoy himself.

The beginning of the next week was to witness the de-

parture of one of our little party, Richard Woodleigh having been suddenly summoned to London. The servant brought the letter in haste from his hotel to ours, where my cousin happened to be.

"Is anything wrong, Richard?" I asked, as he turned pale, sat back in the chair, and drew a long breath.

"Yes; the governor's very ill—given over," he cried, springing to his feet. "A sudden attack of paralysis, Upton writes. I am to return at once. Here, read."

Whilst I was perusing the note which he had tossed towards me, Richard Woodleigh, in a strange state of excitement, paced the drawing-room, his arms folded, his looks bent downwards. Mr. Markingham, who had been standing at the window gazing out at the bay, turned round and regarded him, followed him with his eyes, and watched his every step.

"Sad news," said I, holding the letter towards him; "but I trust the result will not be so bad as Upton fears. It is very sudden."

Cousin Dick took no heed of the letter, or of my comments upon it; he continued his rapid walk, the eyes of Mr. Markingham still on him.

"And I am penned here, hundreds and hundreds of miles away," he cried at last, "whilst my enemies are setting him against me!"

It was an outburst that he could not check, cunning as he was; it was the one thought burning in his brain, and his passion for a moment carried him away.

"I must go at once—I must begin my journey!" he cried, snatching at the letter, and crushing it in his hand. "There is much to be done at home, and every minute is precious. We shall meet in London, Robert. Good-bye!"

He rushed out of the room before I had recovered my surprise. Mr. Markingham and I exchanged glances.

"Poor fellow!" I said, "it is a great shock. I am very sorry for him—and for those at home."

"He must be a hard man on whom such news makes no impression," said Markingham, "and a harder man still whose first thought is for the money left behind, rather than for the father stricken down."

"I don't think that you have a right to judge hastily, Mr. Markingham."

"I judge by appearances," was the reply; "in the ful-

ness of the heart, the tongue of Richard Woodleigh betrayed itself."

I did not discuss the point; I was in no mood for argument, and I had my own doubts as to the real nature of Cousin Dick's troubles. The news had disturbed me too; and as I descended to the Chiaia, and hurried along in search of a quiet spot for reflection, I could but think of the blow that had fallen on those I had left behind—on the weak wife, the fond daughters, on Upton, whose reverence for his father was a something very deep and holy.

"It may not be so bad as they anticipate," I thought, "I may soon hear good news from Dick."

But no good news came—no letter; and the first tidings I received stared me from that column in the *Times* which gives to the world daily its brief announcements of sorrow.

"Died, Dec., 1847, at his residence, Grove House, Paddington, Mr. James Woodleigh, aged 58, deeply regretted by his friends and relatives."

Thus had the destroying hand come at last in the midst of the Woodleighs, and snatched first at him who had been their help and support. As I looked gloomily at the *Times*, at the well-known name coupled with that other name known unto us all, I wished that I had seen him once again, and bidden him good-bye before I left for foreign lands.



CHAPTER III.

BEFORE THE STORM.

IN the second week of January, 1848, King Ferdinand the Second of Naples was startled in his royal palace by news from Sicily. Such news as sent the life-blood to his heart, and excited his mercurial subjects to delirium. Sicily had thrown off the yoke of the oppressor, and drawn the sword in earnest; Messina, Catania, Syracuse, even Palermo, it was rumoured, were in the hands of the revolutionists, and the soldiers of the king were waiting help from Naples.

He who has seen Naples in its sober moments, and wondered if the tarantula has not been busy with its people, can

form an idea of the effect which the tidings from Sicily created. Madness appeared to have seized the people in the streets, at cafés, and in the markets; men and women ran frantically about and told the news, nobles and lazzaroni, national guard and priests, fishermen, peasants, and Zampognatori—who had not yet taken back their bagpipes to the Abruzzi, although the Christmas of 1847 was three weeks old—beggars and thieves fraternised together, stood, or rather danced, in groups, flung about their arms, fought, swore, and prayed. Shopkeepers left their goods to hear the last report which, fabricated by some lying Neapolitan, had never come from Sicily; strange faces, which were unknown in Naples, and had sedition stamped upon them, rose as if by magic in the streets, were seen in the open squares and market-places, mingled with the thousands of loiterers before the Palazzo Reale, wherein the leech was drawing blood from Bomba.

On the following day the city, from an early hour in the morning, resounded with the tramp of soldiers and the rattle of artillery; and from daybreak till late in the afternoon the sullen King of Naples, ill as he was, remained in the harbour watching the embarkation of his troops, and praying perhaps with his white lips for help to tyranny and murder.

Squire Heberdeen, almost as excited as the Neapolitans by the news, forgot his loftiness and reserve, and came to Markingham to discuss the politics of Sicily; his English blood was warmed, and he was anxious to express his opinions on the subject and hear those of Mr. Markingham. But Mr. Markingham was not disposed to hazard a remark in the drawing-room of the Hôtel Vittoria, where half the visitors might be spies of the police for what he knew of the matter.

"Better hear and say nothing, Squire," said Markingham, looking sharply round him to make sure a fourth person was not at his elbow; "Naples is a dangerous place for free conversation, and underground accommodation in the Castle of St. Elmo is not worth striving after."

"Perhaps you are right," answered the Squire, "but, like my dear boy Ned, I am too hot-headed to be cautious, and it's really enough to enrage a saint to hear of the vile——"

"When do you intend to leave Naples?" quietly interrupted Markingham.

"Not till my Harriet has entirely recovered her strength," replied he; "for now we are here, living is cheaper than in England, and," with a smile, "one must study economy."

"I think that we had better seize the first opportunity to withdraw," said Markingham; "the storm has begun in Sicily; Tuscany has not done fermenting, and Naples may come in for a share of the firebrands which Discordia is lavishly scattering."

"There are too many troops at the beck of Ferdinand at present," said the Squire, "and the Neapolitans are aware of it."

"The king must give way then, and get rid of his confessor and a few of his false friends. But," cried he, "here we are drifting into politics notwithstanding our caution. Mr. Robert Woodleigh, here, sets us the best example by his silence."

"Silent people think the more, Mr. Markingham," I answered.

"Are you anxious to quit Naples, Mr. Woodleigh?" asked the Squire, turning to me.

"Not if there be a chance of the Neapolitans imitating the Sicilians," said I. "It is time the Bourbon——"

"There, there, you had better say no more," cried Markingham; "I can guess your sentiments, and so can Mr. Heberdeen. You may be inclined to stay in Naples and see what a revolution is like, but Mr. Heberdeen and I are older and more cautious men."

"I am not anxious to leave the city," said Heberdeen.

"You are not alone, Squire," observed Markingham, significantly.

"True, true," answered Heberdeen—"there is Harriet—you reprove me justly, Markingham. We must watch these signs of a tempest carefully—a few more days will tell."

The few more days passed, and despite inflammatory placards which were found in the early morning at the corners of the streets, despite the continuance of the struggle in Sicily, and the disembarking of wounded troops upon the quay at Naples, nothing more serious occurred than a few false alarms, which kept the lazzaroni and the soldiers lively. Some small concessions to the people, and some very extensive promises, the presence of a large number of troops in Naples, and of a larger number in the environs, appeared to exercise an effect upon those to whom the iron rule of Ferdinand was irksome.

"The storm-clouds are breaking up," said Squire Heberdeen to Mr. Markingham, at their next meeting.

"It appears so," answered Markingham, in a fidgety manner; "but that is no reason why we should linger here."

"I shall remain three months longer, now," said the Squire.
"When do you think of leaving Naples?"

"I don't know," Markingham replied shortly—"perhaps next week, or next month—it depends upon circumstances."

A few days after that brief dialogue, three cannon shot from the Castle of St. Elmo startled Mr. Markingham and me.

"Do you hear that?" cried I, starting to my feet.

"Yes; it has come at last, and Squire Heberdeen his but himself to thank for his obstinacy. Where are you going?"

"Out. I can't stop here—do you hear the cheers of the people? I'm off."

"Stop!" shouted Markingham.

But I was already hurrying down stairs, and deaf to adjuration. I found crowds of people in the streets, and masses of soldiers in the squares and round the palaces; drums beating to arms, the red flags hoisted on the castles, thirty thousand people, with the tricolour in the midst, collected in the Toledo, and shouted for the constitution. On the balconies and at the windows there were ladies waving handkerchiefs and tricolour ribbons; facing the mob were grim regiments of cavalry, and there was cannon hiding round the corners of the streets.

I forced my way into the crowd and shouted with the rest. A strange excitement was upon me; here was something new and dangerous to participate in, and my life had been a dull one lately!

But the storm burst not, though it was the turning of a hair between peace and civil war. There was one faint charge of cavalry, but the horses stumbled on the lava pavement, and a few Neapolitan soldiers who had bitten the dust were raised by the people and sent back unhurt. A few more cries for king and constitution, a few more hearty curses against the ministry of Naples, and then there were promises made by generals in the name of the king, promises even brought by the king's messengers from the palace, and then all was over, and it was "Viva il Re" again.

"Good news for Naples, Mr. Markingham," said I on my return; "the ministry has resigned."

"And so have I," replied Markingham, sharply; "resigned all hope of seeing a wise head on those shoulders of yours. Do you know that head might have been off by this time, Hotspur?"

"General Stabella has promised us the constitution."

"Promised *us*," repeated Markingham with emphasis; "what the devil, Sir, has General Stabella or the constitution to do with you? You are getting worse than Heberdeen, who talks high treason at the top of his lungs."

"But——"

"But I don't want to hear any of the news," said Markingham, interrupting me; "and I would give five hundred pounds to be on my way to England."

"Well, I am ready to start, Sir. Naples will soon be in its holiday dress again, and I don't care for it."

"No, we will stay till—till Heberdeen leaves. He's no more to be trusted in this inflammable country than you are."

So we remained, and saw Naples turn loyal again. The king was the best of kings and the most amiable of men; his loving subjects showered blessings on him as he rode through the streets, and nearly tore the seats of San Carlo up in their enthusiasm when he patronised the opera with his presence.

A few more weeks, during which Squire Heberdeen's fits of reserve set in again, then there came bad news, and fresh suspicions of Ferdinand's good faith, rumours of intrigue in court and cabinet, revolutions in Sicily, Venice, Milan, and all Lombardy, tidings of that great Paris revolution which drove a king to England for shelter, and shook, as with an earthquake, two-thirds of the continent.

It was not till May that Squire Heberdeen resolved to return to England; then the clouds were hanging over Naples again and the people mistrusted ministers, the king and themselves.

"Now Harriet is quite strong again," said the Squire, whom we had met by chance on the morning of Sunday; "it is time we thought of England and Ned."

"And a certain Richard Woodleigh too," observed Markingham.

The Squire laughed.

"Well, there is a fair daughter of mine who will neither be sorry to meet him," he said, "nor to leave Naples, where lovers and friends are scarce."

"You are not without friends even in Naples, Heberdeen," said Markingham.

"Perhaps not," replied the Squire briefly.

"And if those friends meet you in England at a future day, you will not turn the cold shoulder to them, I hope."

"Markingham," said the Squire, laying his hand upon his arm, "let me tell you frankly that friendship between us is impossible. I have attempted to keep down my dislikes, I have even tried to feel towards you as an old friend and schoolfellow—but the ghost of the lawsuit will rise up before me, and all your good qualities cannot keep it down. It warns me from your company, it points to your station and to mine, it revives constantly my past losses and anxiety. I tell you this, Markingham, on the eve of my departure, because I feel that I have been often cold and unjust towards you, have churlishly received much kindness at your hands, and I regret——"

"No apologies are requisite, Mr. Heberdeen."

"Let me thank you, then, for all favours."

"What favours?" asked Markingham, sharply.

"There, I am disturbing you," said the Squire; "I fear, too, I have pained you, but I could not leave Naples without a statement of my feelings, lest——"

He paused, and Markingham said:—

"Lest I should trouble you and your family in London. Well, you have adopted the best course, Heberdeen, and there is an end to the story. We shall not meet again, I dare say; and so, as the poets say," extending his hand, "'a long and last farewell!'"

"We do not leave till to-morrow.—I shall call once more with Harriet to say good-bye."

"No, don't do that!" said Markingham, quickly.

The Squire looked surprised.

"I should be sorry to trouble Miss Heberdeen," said Markingham. "I should—in fact, I would prefer parting in this manner. Express unto her, if you please—or if you like," he added carelessly, "my best wishes for her health and happiness, and receive the same yourself, Heberdeen."

"Thank you."

The friends of the past shook hands together, and then Mr. Heberdeen turned towards me and shook hands likewise.

"One moment," said Markingham, after some little hesitation, "before we go our separate ways, taking the paths that are never to cross again, I fear that I must offend you."

"No. We will part without any ill feeling in our hearts, Markingham."

"I am about to offer you advice."

"Say on."

"It is advice that you would prefer hearing privately," said Markingham, drawing the Squire aside.

It was advice that took time to communicate, too, and I could see the Squire's face redden once or twice, and even the eyebrows lower, as he and Markingham walked a few paces in advance of me. It was finished at last, and I heard the Squire say as I came up with them—

"I was certainly not prepared for such advice—I may say for such reproof."

"I said that I should offend you."

"No," cried the Squire, his face brightening, "you have *not* offended me; there is no ground for your suspicion, but still it is kind of you to think of us, despite the barrier which keeps us—will ever keep us—separate. Addio."

"Is this our last meeting?" muttered Markingham, looking after the tall figure of the Squire; "does it seem natural, possible, that in another moment he will vanish from my sight for ever? Well, so much the better for him, he thinks, and—so much the better for me, *I know!*"



CHAPTER IV.

THE FIFTEENTH OF MAY.

SQUIRE HEBERDEEN had not vanished from the sight of Stephen Markingham for ever, for late that very afternoon he and his daughter were announced as visitors.

"Not yet the last adieu, gentlemen," said the Squire, as he entered, with his daughter on his arm. "Harriet would not rest satisfied with your best wishes by proxy, Mr. Markingham."

"Mr. Markingham would have thought me most uncourteous had I been so easily satisfied," said Miss Heberdeen, offering her hand, over which Markingham bowed gracefully.

"Partings for an indefinite period, Miss Heberdeen, are always painful, even when those who shake hands and say good-bye are not the most intimate of friends."

"But we have been very intimate in Naples, Mr. Markingham," she replied, "and it would have been strange to go

away without seeing you. Besides, you are one of our oldest friends, I have heard."

Squire Heberdeen had evidently not related the particulars of his late dialogue with Markingham; he looked embarrassed.

"And latest enemy also, Miss Heberdeen," answered Markingham; "but you are of the forgiving sex, in whom the remembrance of an injury does not rankle for a lifetime. Your father and I are of a different stamp, and the wounds take longer healing. Am I right, Squire?"

"Yes."

"No, no," said Miss Heberdeen, her cheek flushing; "the wounds are healed, I am sure of it! My father does not bear you malice, Mr. Markingham, for the result of that trial which made you a rich man—he has a higher mind than that."

"You are right, Miss Heberdeen," was Markingham's reply. "I have sufficient knowledge of his character to believe it. There is a difference between honest pride and malice. I understand your father, for I have often experienced his feelings."

"The subject is not a pleasant one to any of us," said the Squire—"let it cease."

Miss Heberdeen turned to me.

"Any commands for England, Mr. Woodleigh?"

"If you will remember me kindly to my cousins and my aunt, and assure them of my sympathy with their loss, I shall feel indebted, Miss Heberdeen!"

After Miss Heberdeen had replied that my message should be faithfully delivered, and a few more minutes had passed in conversation, adieus were exchanged, and the parting which Markingham had seemed to fear was over.

"Well, *now* we have seen them for the last time, I suppose," said Markingham, "or are there to be any more meetings and partings?"

"In England, perhaps."

"Shall we ever return thither?"

"Were you not anxious to leave Naples lest an outbreak should occur?"

"I have changed my mind," said Markingham, "and after to-morrow Naples may boil over, if it likes, and if Vesuvius come in with a supplementary eruption, I shall be happy to make an excursion to the top with you."

"I thought you objected to excitement."

"So I did once," he answered, "but your restless nature has infected me. When two persons live together, the weaker mind gives way."

"The weaker mind," said I, laughing,—“ah! Mr. Markingham, that is your old irony.”

"Have you ever fallen into my habits—had the ghost of a taste for the fine arts, or been sober, reflective, fond of books, or dry discussions? No, you have turned from everything steady, and gone rolling your own way, and now, presto, I feel inclined to roll after you! Yours is the master mind, Woodleigh. Let us get into the fresh air—I have had enough of wine and tobacco-smoke."

Mr. Markingham was certainly not himself that night. He walked the streets of Naples at a rapid pace—he talked philosophy again after the old Barker Street style; he marched out of the town into the dark environs; he went down to the sea-shore and looked at the waters of the bay, twinkling in the starlight; he walked back once more into the city, the streets of which were filling fast with people.

"What's in the wind now, Woodleigh?" said Markingham, looking at his watch—"ten o'clock at night, and the streets not thinning!"

Markingham caught the next man by the sleeve as he was hurrying by, and asked if there were anything wrong in Naples.

"No, *eccellenza*—the deputies have only objected to the parliamentary oath, *eccellenza*, and they are met in the Sala di Monte Oliveto, *eccellenza*, and—*maladizione*, I shall be too late for the news!"

Neapolitan stranger, mad as a March hare, darted away, and I said:—

"Shall we follow the stream, Sir?"

"The stream sometimes leads to a sea where there are many shipwrecks," replied Markingham.

"Oh! it will be the old story—the people firm, the king wavering. There is no danger."

"I don't care for danger," said Markingham, "but I may be concerned for a certain headstrong young gentleman, who would shoot his own father, if he had one, for the novelty of it. However, there is a set determination on his strong visage now, and I am with him. The weaker mind gives way again, anything for a change, Signor Woodleigh!"

Whether he really desired a change that night, or thought his presence might be a check on any adventurous spirit seizing me, I know not, certain it is that in less than five minutes we were in the midst of the crowd in the Strada di Monte Oliveto—that strange turbulent crowd which was filling every street, and murmuring like a sea.

Half-past ten—eleven. Still in the streets, the deputies earnestly debating—the crowd increasing—the National Guard, the only true hearts midst the mass, sternly awaiting the result.

“*Viva il Re*’—the king gives way at last, the oath shall be modified—long live good Ferdinand of Naples!”

Twelve o’clock. Every street in Naples full of people, good news to the loving subjects of the King, whose secret orders were flying from garrison to garrison—“BRING OUT THE TROOPS!” Orders not secret enough, however, to escape quick ears; signs not hidden deep enough to deceive quick eyes—for presently the news spread that treachery was intended, and all was in ferment again.

“This will be a sad night for Naples,” said Markingham; “there are faces in the crowd that mean mischief.”

“They say the king has ordered out the troops,” I replied. “The coward means to break his word.”

“Silence, Woodleigh,” whispered Markingham; “we are not in England.”

After midnight, affairs looked desperate; torches were flaring in a thousand hands, barricades were rising in the principal streets; the Toledo, Monte Oliveto, Pignano, were blocked up; the National Guards were in arms against the king, posted at the barricades, in possession of the windows of the houses, engaged in digging trenches and pitfalls for the cavalry.

“Shall we go home?” asked Markingham.

“No.”

“You are trembling and excited—this is not a pic-nic, Woodleigh.”

“I will see the storm out. This way.”

“Where are you going?”

“Behind the barricades—leave go my arm. Let me for once in my life do something useful.”

“Is it of any use to throw away your life?”

“Is my life of value to anyone that I should set great store by it?”

"Ah! here comes the reckless devil-may-care fit on. Forward, Sir, I follow you—

'Quiet to quick bosoms is a hell!'

"I don't wish to lead you into danger, Sir," said I, hesitating.

"Is my life of value to anyone?" answered Markingham in my own words; "is there anybody to miss *me* if a chance bullet send me to Hades? Hark! they are beating the *générale*—it is too late to go back now!"

Before two o'clock that morning, troops of infantry, cavalry and artillery, were in the streets, gathered in masses before the palace, and in the open spaces facing the castle and market-place. At the barricades, undeterred by the grim mouths of cannon pointed at them, the National Guard pursued their labours, increased their means of defence, and waited for the worst. Standing in dense crowds, watching both sides of the game, were the lazzaroni, crafty, perfidious race of beggars and thieves, ready to sell soul and body to the highest bidder.

"The Neapolitan people hold aloof," said Markingham, when we were standing behind the barricade of Santa Brigida; "there are not a thousand of them on the side of right at present."

"They will not side with the king's troops, surely," I exclaimed.

"It is questionable," answered Markingham, drily. "They are Neapolitans!"

The night passed on without a shot being fired. Ferdinand had gathered experience in Sicily, and feared the consequences that might follow the first blow. All night and all the morning, till the clocks were striking nine, messengers were passing from barricade to palace—Ferdinand began to yield, to promise the opening of parliament without the oath, to do all that was requisite for the benefit of his faithful subjects. But the barricades remained, the tricolour flag still waved, the National Guard and the people had not thinned, and the Swiss and Royal troops had come out in greater force.

"This is all parade, as it was last January," said Markingham, "and will end in nothing. Have you had enough of life at the barricades?"

"Almost."

"If we could only get home through these ranks of insurgents," said Markingham, looking round him.

"Stop," I cried; "something is the matter."

A musket had been fired, whether by accident or design is, I think, doubtful to this day, there was a rush up the barricades by the National Guard, a clattering of arms, a levelling of guns, and then the quick, sharp discharge of musketry.

"Rash, rash," muttered Markingham; "this is the beginning of an evil day for Naples. What is the date, Woodleigh?"

"The fifteenth of May, I think."

"History will remember it!"

He had hardly spoken, before the firing from the opposite side commenced in rapid and incessant volleys, and was responded to by the revolutionists. Civil war seemed to have suddenly settled on the oppressed nation, the standard of revolt was flying, the carnage had commenced, they were already dropping dead from the barricades to my feet.

Presently the heavy boom of cannon from the king's side was added to the hum of the scene; and amidst the shouting of the thousands still neutral the war proceeded, the rattle of musketry continued, and the grape shot plunged amongst us.

How I got there is a matter of uncertainty, but presently I was on the summit of the barricades, musket in hand, firing on the king's troops like a true patriot, the brave guard of the nation by my side, a hundred or two of Calabrians, some Frenchmen, and a few Englishmen—amateur insurgents like myself—just visible around me through the smoke.

The excitement of the scene carried away all sense of danger. I shouted for liberty, waved my hat, and fired at the Swiss hirelings, or clubbed my musket and knocked them down, as they came clambering up the barricades. Five times were the Swiss troops beaten back at that single barricade by its resolute defenders. Had Naples been true to itself that memorable day of carnage, where would the Bourbons have been by this time, I wonder? *

But the people, the glorious people, struck at last, and—for the king! The promise of pillage to the lazzaroni was more substantial, more profitable than liberty, and that disgraceful promise, oh Ferdinand of Naples, was made to thine eternal infamy.

Viva il Re! the mob was for the king—the royal cause was backed by countless numbers, which rushed like a sea at the

* This story was published before the annexation of Naples to the Italian kingdom.

defences, and like a sea was beaten back whilst powder and shot remained to the insurgents.

"Robert," cried Markingham, suddenly appearing at my side (I had not missed him for three hours), "come away. It's all over—there is no hope for Naples!"

"No hope—why not?"

"They are short of ammunition, and are retiring to the houses and the Largo del Castello; the cause is hopeless."

"Should I fly for that reason, Markingham?"

"They will all fly presently—the day is lost. Let us descend, the National Guards set us the example. Fool-hardiness is not bravery."

I looked round. It was too true, the cause was lost. The insurgents were hurrying into the houses or making for other streets and barricades, and the soldiers and the lazzaroni were shouting and screaming like a host of demons.

"Can we reach the hotel?"

"What, gun in hand!" exclaimed Markingham; "we should soon reach the Castle of St. Elmo and the point of the Neapolitan bayonet. No, this way. Quick, before they mount the barricade."

Amidst the flying ranks of the vanquished, and with the shot whizzing past our ears, I followed Markingham through a maze of streets with which he appeared to be perfectly acquainted. Five minutes afterwards, those streets were full of the lazzaroni, burning, stealing, stabbing with the knife and bayonet all who crossed their path, firing the houses after the spoil had been gutted from them, hurling from the windows men, women, and children into the bloody streets below.

A larger street, another barricade defended by a few hundred men sternly waiting for the royalists. As we advanced, the holders of the barricade received us, and a few of the National Guard who accompanied us, with a loud cheer.

"This must be defended to the last, Woodleigh," said Markingham; "we must strike a blow here, more for the sake of friends than liberty."

"Are the Heberdeens near?"

"Yes. Remain here while I hasten to the Squire and warn him to seek a safer place of shelter. I will return immediately."

"No heed to hasten, Markingham," said a voice close to his ear; "Heberdeen is here in person to thank you heartily for your consideration."

"What do you want here, above all men in Naples?" cried Markingham, so fiercely and peremptorily that the Squire, astonished at his vehemence, made a backward step, and stared at him. "There is a better place for you, Squire Heberdeen."

"Where, Sir?"

"By your daughter's side."

"My daughter is safe—she is already hastening to a more secure retreat."

"Good God! has she gone alone?" almost shrieked Markingham; "have you left her to wander about Naples at this awful time, whilst you idle away moments precious to her life?"

"Mr. Markingham," said Heberdeen, in his proudest manner, "I do not require to be taught a father's duty."

"Mr. Heberdeen, I ask you again, has she gone alone?" said Markingham sternly.

Heberdeen hesitated—the new dictatorial manner of Markingham brought the colour to his cheek, and for a moment his lips compressed, and the hand that held the musket trembled. It was for a moment only, then the better nature conquered, and Heberdeen grasped Markingham's hand and wrung it warmly.

"You put your questions in rough English, Markingham," said he, "but they express an interest in my Harriet, and it is kind of you to think of her at a time when everyone seems thinking of himself. Thank you, thank you!"

"Has she gone alone?" said Markingham, for the third time.

"No. She is accompanied by two servants belonging to the house. She is going to one Damano's, a fisherman. In a time of pillage, the poorest quarters afford the safest refuge."

"Possibly," said Markingham in an absent manner.

"If the barricade remain firm for only five minutes longer, my dear daughter will be securely housed. For that five minutes I remain with this handful of brave men. I am of more service here."

"Here are the troops," cried Markingham, "and they are bringing the artillery to bear upon us. Will not five minutes see the barricade a ruin?"

"I pray not," said Heberdeen, fervently.

Shouting, blaspheming, wildly gesticulating, came the soldiers and lazzaroni, pouring along the streets towards us, firing at the houses on each side of the way, and waging war

at every threshold with those who fought for home, or wives, or children. All order was at an end ; soldiers, officers, and people were mixed together, and were even fighting amongst themselves for spoil.

There was one wild yell of rage—such as Satan may have heard in Pandemonium—at the sight of the barricade and its defenders, and then the bullets whistled through the air, and the cannon shot came crashing through the barricade.

“This is a hopeless fight, Heberdeen,” said Markingham ; “the victory is for the strong, and the weak are already giving way. See ! the insurgents are thinning.”

“Five minutes have not passed yet,” muttered the Squire.

“They are abandoning the defence,” said Markingham ; “he who stays another instant is a madman.”

Heberdeen gave one despairing look round him, then turned.

“Come, then. It is vain to——”

The Squire stopped, staggered, put his hand to his side and fell.

“He is hit,” cried Markingham, kneeling at his side and raising his head ; “Heberdeen, Heberdeen, are you hurt much ?”

“I fear so,” he murmured faintly ; “where is your hand ?”

“Here.”

“Raise me, if you can. I think I can—walk—a little—way. Oh ! Harriet, Harriet—my poor dear, fatherless girl !”

“No, no—not so bad as that, old friend—God forbid that !” cried Markingham. “Robert, help me to raise him—we must not lose an instant now.”

We lifted the wounded Squire to his feet, and hurried him away from the barricade, which some stanch hearts were still defending hopelessly.

“This street,” said the Squire, indicating a narrow turning which we were about to pass, “then the third lane—at the back of the old church. I fear you must leave me, Markingham ; I must give up—here !”

His head dropped and he would have sunk to the ground again, had not our arms supported him.

“He has swooned,” said Markingham ; “we must carry him, Woodleigh.”

As we flung away our muskets and raised him, we cast a backward glance towards the spot that had been fatal to the Squire. They were struggling on the barricade, the victory

was with the royalists, the insurgents were flying, and "*Viva il Re!*" was ringing from a thousand brazen throats.

"This is a race for life or death," said Markingham, as we hurried along with our sad burden; "if anything should happen to me, Woodleigh, you will find that I have not forgotten you."

"Oh! no more of that, Sir; let us hope we have seen the worst now."

"A chance shot may reduce me to poor Heberdeen's condition, and then you must fly for your own sake, for your mother's! Take care of Miss Heberdeen,—remember."

"And if you should be the survivor, Sir, will you tell that mother of mine her ungrateful boy thought of her at the last?"

"Yes," said Markingham, hoarsely. "Now, quicker, Woodleigh; some of them are coming."

"No," I cried, looking behind me, "they are passing the end of the street, and making for the square. Don't you hear how the shouting dies away?"

"They may intercept us yet," said Markingham. "This wilderness of turnings may lead us into the jaws of destruction. He said at the third lane, did he not?"

"Yes—at the back of the old church."

We continued our way, a few fugitives, lighter of foot and less heavily burdened, in advance of us. One sturdy soldier of the National Guard, who had been running before us and looking occasionally in our direction, suddenly stopped and came towards us.

"Dead, Signor?" with a quick movement of his hand towards the Squire.

"No—wounded."

"Holy Madonna, how he bleeds! Wounded at the barricades?"

"Yes."

"Take his head, Signor, and let me hold his feet. So."

He suited the action to the words, and after I had taken my place by Markingham's side at the head of the Squire, we set off at a more rapid pace.

The third turning—a small old church at the corner, with a narrow squalid lane running at the back.

"This must be the street," said Markingham; "a few more minutes and we shall be safe. If Heberdeen would only speak!"

"Markingham," said the faint voice of the Squire as if in answer, "where are we?"

"At the back of the church."

"Keep on to——"

"To where?" said Markingham. "For Harriet's sake, try and tell us, Heberdeen!"

"To the end of the street, where the—nets are hanging. The—fifth—house—from—the end."

Heberdeen's head dropped on his chest again.

"If we could only find a surgeon," murmured Markingham, "all might be well yet."

The lane appeared deserted by our species. The doors and windows of every house were open, and only a few dogs growled at us as we passed. As we splashed our way through mud and stagnant water, the noise in the distant streets died gradually away, and a low murmur but sounded in the distance, broken at irregular intervals by the boom of cannon, which roused the echoes of the place and set the dogs barking in the wretched homes they guarded.

"I must prepare *her* now," muttered Markingham—"follow as slowly as you can, and give me time. The fifth house—the name Damano."

Markingham resigned his charge, and ran towards the house wherein Miss Heberdeen had sought shelter from the storm. I watched him as we followed in his footsteps, saw him knock at a door at the end of the street, stand a moment and then knock again. Presently he was admitted, and almost at the same moment, a man, bare-headed, bare-footed, rushed from the house and tore off in an opposite direction.

Before we reached the house, Heberdeen raised his head and said:—

"Markingham."

"Mr. Markingham has gone to prepare your daughter for the accident, Mr. Heberdeen."

"It is kind—of—him!"

The head began to drop again.

"The worst is over now, Sir, and we shall soon have a doctor to attend you. Mr. Markingham has already sent for one."

The Squire made no answer.

Before the house, one step from the street into the low dusky room, where there were two children, four women, and Mr. Markingham. Three women were together, two young ones and an old dark-faced crone—and the fourth, Miss Heberdeen, was standing in the centre of the room, her hands clasped together, a wild look in her eyes, and a death-like whiteness on her face. Markingham was close beside her.

"My dear Miss Heberdeen," I heard him say, "I must trust to you not to give way. It may be fatal to your father."

"I will try, Sir," she answered, her hands locking together more rigidly, "I will—do—my best!"

As we placed the wounded Squire on a litter of clothes which had been hurriedly thrown on the floor for his reception, the daughter slowly sank into a crouching position by the father's side, and gazed anxiously—how anxiously!—into his face.

"Father," she murmured—"father, do you know me?"

The eyes opened.

"Oh! Harriet, this is a sad day for you, girl."

"Don't speak, father—you must keep quiet, very quiet—see how calm I am!"

"Brave girl!"

"The doctor will be here almost directly."

"I shall not need one."

"Oh! don't say that," cried Miss Heberdeen; "you will soon be well again, father, I am sure you will. You are but slightly hurt, and when the doctor comes—good God, how long he is!"

"Miss Heberdeen," adjured Markingham, "your promise!"

"Harriet, dear," said the Squire, "the bullet that struck me down was God's message. His will, remember—to be done on earth as in Heaven! Where is—Markingham?"

"Here," said Markingham.

"You are an old friend," said he, clutching eagerly at the hand which Markingham extended to him—"you will be a friend to her?"

"You may trust me."

"You will see her safe to England, and place her in her brother's charge? Oh! Markingham, you will take care of her in her loneliness?"

"As though she were my daughter."

"God bless you—for—that!" he murmured, releasing Markingham's hand. "Harriet, where are you?"

"At your side, father," sobbed the daughter—"don't you see me?"

"It—is—very—dark," he answered.

When his daughter's hand lay clasped in his, he said:—

"Tell Ned to remember me sometimes—his father who was proud of him! Oh! my dear boy, if I could but see him once again, I wouldn't care for dying. What noise is that?"

The door opened, and the fisherman, accompanied by a spare, lame old gentleman, came into the room.

Markingham went towards the old gentleman and whispered a few words to him ; but she who had been so anxious for his coming turned not her head, even appeared unconscious of his presence. When he was kneeling on the other side, his hand upon the pulse of the dying man, she took no heed, and when he muttered in Italian, "Too late," there was but a faint shiver as with cold.

The Squire spoke again ; how faint the voice was then !

"Harriet, you are very young to be left in the world alone ; the Father of all watch over you, keep evil from you, and instruct your heart aright—good-bye !"

"No, no, no, dear father, not good-bye," passionately cried his daughter, "not to leave me alone without a friend, without a hope in this benighted land. Oh !" looking wildly round her, "is there no one here to help him ?"

"Hush, girl," said Heberdeen, "you disturb me."

In an instant she sat motionless by his side, his hand clasped between her own.

"Kiss me now, and say good-bye."

"Good-bye !"

"When you were a little girl at Nettleton," he murmured, "you used to say, kneeling at your mother's feet, a simple prayer—and yet a prayer so sweet and earnest that God's angels must have listened—will you say it once again ? I should—so—like—to hear it !"

With her father's hand still clasped between her own, she knelt and prayed for sinners, and we stood with bowed heads, listening.

When the last word was uttered, she who had prayed fell to the ground, and burying her face in her hands, sobbed out with all the passionate intensity of woman :—

"Dead, dead !"

"*Madre di Dio !*" whispered the fisherman, as he advanced and looked over my shoulder at the lifeless form of poor Heberdeen ; "the Signorina is right !"

CHAPTER V

HOME.

THE day following the revolt, which Ferdinand had quelled with the strong hand, five ships of the French squadron sailed for Civita Vecchia, having on board three thousand fugitives from Naples.

Mr. Markingham and I remained in the city, dangerous abode as it was for anyone of liberal opinions. We had sad duties to perform, a fair girl prostrate with fever to watch over, an old friend to consign to his grave in foreign soil.

It was the end of May before Miss Heberdeen was better, and during the time that elapsed before her convalescence the true nature of Markingham developed itself. Twenty times a-day, at least, he went from his hotel to her apartments to make inquiry concerning her, and to give orders that her lightest wish was not to be neglected. When she was better and could quit her room, it was his arm on which she leaned, it was his voice that sought to console her for her loss. He was as gentle and thoughtful as a woman, and he took the father's place by her side, as though it were his right.

She was not anxious to leave Naples—even the names of her brother and lover, which Markingham essayed at times, when she lay prostrate with grief, did not rouse her; weak in body and depressed in mind, it seemed as if it was fated that the beautiful girl should find her resting-place by the side of her father.

"She is not strong," said Markingham, to me; "every street in Naples is full of sad associations—every day longer here is a step nearer her grave."

"Poor girl, she has seen much sorrow in her young life."

"And if God spare her, she will see more."

"Surely the worst is over."

Markingham shook his head.

"She has lost mother and father—will not the lover come next?" he said.

"I do not know enough of Richard Woodleigh to answer that question."

"We shall know enough some day."

Early in June, when Naples was disturbed again, when Fer-

dinand was troubled for his life, and feared some stealthy hand might put an end to it and to the affliction under which Naples suffered—Markingham's endeavours to persuade Miss Heberdeen to leave Italy had, at last, their effect.

"I am in your hands, Mr. Markingham," she said; "it matters little to me which country I am in, I fear."

"You have a dear friend in England."

"Yes, he must be expecting me, poor Ned. You wrote to him, Sir?"

"Some weeks since."

"Name the day for departure, and I will be prepared. It is a selfish sorrow of mine, that keeps you from *your* friends, Mr. Markingham."

"Where are they, Miss Heberdeen?"

"One is with you—at your side," she answered: "you will let me call you friend?—you who have been so kind, so good to me!"

"I desire no greater honour."

"You were my poor father's friend once—my mother's too I think, Sir."

"Yes."

"A few days before—before he died," she said with an effort, "my father spoke of you—regretting that his pride and position would not suffer him to renew the past intimacy"

"Did he say anything more?—did he tell you the story of two school-fellows becoming rivals for one maiden, of the elder winning her for a wife?"

"He told me all, Sir."

"I am glad of that—it is a story I have long wished you to know."

After that dialogue, the friendship between Miss Heberdeen and Mr. Markingham made rapid progress. She placed a daughter's confidence in him, and he regarded her with all a father's reverence.

Leaving behind for ever the troubled nation and the false Bourbon, we started at last for England, fortunate in having escaped the dungeon or the knife—a fate which befell many more innocent than ourselves in that land where Might set its foot on Right and kept it in the dust.

We touched the shores of England in the fair summer time. What a welcome to the wanderer did the white cliffs of my native land seem to smile! We three travellers looked at each other and said "Home," as we stood on English ground, and

with all my natural discontent, I felt grateful to see English faces looking into mine—to hear the voice of the Saxon ringing in my ears.

In London at last, standing outside the railway station, the busy world around us ; cabmen and busmen trying to catch our eye, the evening papers tendered us, books of puffing tailors thrust into our hands, nondescript individuals touching napless hats and offering their services to fetch and carry anything ; travellers, outward bound, passing us in a state of great excitement, the world of workers streaming on its way, two years ago seeming but two short minutes, or the beginning of a dream from which we had awakened.

“You go to your mother’s, Woodleigh ?” said Markingham.

“Yes—at once.”

“I have to resign the charge of Miss Heberdeen into her brother’s hands,” said Markingham—“will you meet me at Morley’s in the evening ?”

Having answered in the affirmative, I prepared to take leave of Miss Heberdeen.

“We are old friends now, Mr. Woodleigh,” said she, as her small hand rested in mine—“past events have rendered us no longer strangers to each other. You must come and see my brother Edmund soon.”

I thanked Miss Heberdeen, promised to call with Mr. Markingham, and then I parted from her, thinking how pale she looked again, and how the roses that were blooming on her cheeks in Christmas past had all vanished with the summer !

Dismissing the cab, which had borne me westward a few streets from my mother’s home, I walked slowly towards the house wherein the last parting had taken place. There was a print-shop in the route, and I remember pausing before it and gazing, with a few London stragglers, through its windows, my heart beating strangely all the while. So close to her home, I thought, and to the mother who wept upon my shoulder nearly two years ago, and bade God bless me ! I was anxious to see her, and yet I lingered ; for four months I had received no news of her, and for six months my idle fingers had not set pen to paper. There were engravings of Mr. Bowden in the window—signs of the popularity he had achieved since my departure—and I remember surveying them without much feeling of surprise ;—it seemed quite in the regular way, and a thing to be expected.

Before the house at last — my heart still beating at an unwonted rate. The maid-servant who responded to my knock was a stranger, and to my question, "Is Mrs. Bowden within?" she stared at me in a bewildered manner, and gave no answer.

Before I could repeat the question, the door of the front room opened, and a lady of slight figure, dressed in black, came into the hall.

"Mr. Woodleigh!" she exclaimed.

"Miss Bowden!"

"My father's letter?" she asked anxiously, "the last one, directed to the Hotel Vittoria, Naples—it reached you?"

"No."

"Pray come in, Mr. Woodleigh."

I followed her into the room; there was another well-known figure at the table, bending over an open Bible—my step-father, looking very old and grey, but there was no one else—*oh! no one else!*

END OF THE SIXTH BOOK.

BOOK VII.

FALSE FRIENDS.

"I mean to enjoy the world and to draw out my life at the wire-drawer's,
not to curtail it off at the cutler's."

JOHN LYLY.

"'My birthday,' what a different sound
That word had in my youthful ears!
And how, each time the day comes round,
Less and less white its mark appears."

MOORE.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD LIFE.

BEFORE the summer was over, the old life had begun again. So even and monotonous a life, in a country so matter-of-fact and business-like, that revolutions and hand-to-hand fights at barricades seemed matters of history with which the nineteenth century had no connection.

Yes, the old life had begun again, and all those restless feelings which made my nature sometimes a mystery to myself, which had preyed upon me at home and abroad, and had never left me since my boyhood, increased with every day.

I felt alone in the world after my mother's death, for although that mother had never been studied and loved as she deserved, yet she had been my best friend and comforter; I knew it when it was too late!

I did not even bear my loss patiently, take my share of the world's affliction with bowed head, thinking it was best; I raved over my sorrows, I gave way for a time to an extravagance of grief that was akin to the ridiculous, and then I turned sullen, and affected a callousness to everything, which was rather overdone, though it realised my most miserable expectations.

I did not visit Grove House, Paddington, after my return to England—"They didn't want to see me!" I called not at the warehouses in the Edgware Road—"Upton Woodleigh would be too busy now to care about his cousin!" I wrote not to Tom Arrow—"What did it matter to him whether I were alive or dead?" I sought not my new friend, Richard Woodleigh—"If he wanted me, he would find *me* out!" I kept away from my step-father—"He was a great preacher, and I hated powerful sermons!"

I was most content shut up in Mr. Markingham's library amongst the books I never opened, or walking the streets at a pace that suggested to observers a search for a policeman, a doctor, or a fire engine.

Secretly, I had my objections to Mr. Markingham's behaviour; he did not appear to study me, or to care a great deal whether I was in or out of temper. He was always thinking of the

children of him whom we had left sleeping in Naples, or speaking of the son who had inherited his father's pride, and who, although softened by Markingham's past kindness to his sister, yet hung back from any great exhibition of friendship. The law-suit stood between Markingham and the son, as it had between Markingham and the father—the Heberdeens were an unforgetful race.

Still, there was an intimacy between them—there was no avoiding it. Miss Heberdeen—unforgetful too—remembered the day of her father's death, and Markingham's patience, gentleness, and forethought during her long illness which succeeded it, and she could but welcome him as an old and valued friend.

Young Heberdeen and his sister accepted at last an invitation to Mr. Markingham's house in May Fair—an invitation which had been pressed upon them several times. I was anxious to absent myself from home on the appointed day, and expressed a wish to that effect.

"For what reason, Woodleigh?"

"I don't know. I don't care about seeing them. I have an objection to company."

"Company!" said Markingham. "Miss Heberdeen and her brother 'company!' Why, Woodleigh, it will be a change for you."

"I don't want a change."

"It is time you dropped that fretful series of 'don'ts,' Woodleigh."

"Mr. Heberdeen is no friend of mine."

"But your Cousin Richard is, and he will possibly favour us with his presence."

"Have you written to him, Sir?"

"No; I met him at Coram Street, a few evenings since, and gave him an informal invitation."

"I don't want to see him."

"Don't again!" exclaimed Markingham. "My dear Woodleigh, how captious you are! Come, you dine with us all next Thursday—I ask it as a favour."

"Very well, Sir."

I gave in ungraciously enough, although I was ready with Mr. Markingham, on the appointed afternoon, to receive the looked-for guests. They came, and I turned first to him who had stolen Constance Woodleigh's heart. Two years had altered him more perhaps than they had altered me; he was

no longer the youth, but the man of two-and-twenty. A handsome man, too—there was no denying that; his face was somewhat sallow, but there was a peculiar earnestness of expression on it which attracted even me.

He was not at his ease when he entered, and he shook hands with Mr. Markingham and me in an embarrassed manner. Doubtless it was a strange position for him to stand as a guest beneath the roof of the man who had become rich by his family's ruin, and that thought seemed to trouble him all the evening, despite his efforts to shake it off. Mr. Markingham did not see, or feigned not to see, the occasional flashing of the Heberdeen pride, but I, who sat next him, had many opportunities of observing it. Once, being at a loss for a topic, I made an allusion to Nettleton, but I found that it was dangerous ground to entrench on.

"We have done with Nettleton, Mr. Woodleigh," said he, drawing himself up stiffly—"I would prefer dismissing the subject, with your permission."

"Certainly," was my answer. "I have no desire to prolong it."

Seeing me frown a little at the rebuff, he made an effort to be gracious, spoke of my cousins and aunt at Grove House, and asked if I had heard from them since my return to London.

"Not yet, Mr. Heberdeen," I replied.

"Upton often expresses his surprise that he has not seen you."

"He should come to May Fair, then," said I, with a short laugh. "I am always at home."

"Having the entire management of a large business on his hands, his time is much occupied," said Heberdeen; "you forget that."

"Has Mr. Richard Woodleigh no interest in that business?"

"Not any," said Heberdeen, glancing across the table at his friend; "Richard Woodleigh prefers the pleasures of life to the cares of state. What a frank, easy, good-hearted fellow he is!"

"Is he?"

"Contented with everything, and happy as a king. I used to fancy that he would turn out an extravagant being, but how he has altered! I wish that same virtue of content had been a little more developed in me, for all my lessons from a gentle sister don't keep my temper down."

"May I ask what leads you to suppose my Cousin Richard is of so amiable a disposition, Mr. Heberdeen?"

"Has he not lately exhibited a striking proof of the art of taking the ills of life with composure? Does he look as if he felt his losses acutely?"

"What losses?"

"Has he not told you?"

"My cousin and I meet again to-night for the first time."

"Ah! I had forgotten that. Well, you must wait for his confession—I may be betraying confidence."

I had not long to wait; later in the evening, when Heberdeen and his sister were conversing with Mr Markingham, Cousin Dick came to my side of the table.

"Well, Robert, you have not troubled us much lately."

"Have you missed me, Richard, at Grove House?"

"*They* have, I believe; they often talk of you, which is a sign the absent one is not forgotten, eh?"

"Did you forget me, then?"

"No, I did not," said Dick, "but I took the offence and said to myself, 'here's a friend and relation—who professed an attachment to me in Naples, and played Pythias to my Damon there—has returned to England, and does not exert himself to make the slightest inquiry concerning me.' I was hurt, Robert."

"I have had my trials to bear, and my heart has not felt light enough to seek out the old friends, since the death of my mother."

"Trials!" said Dick; "and have I not had my share? By Jove, I have had nothing but trials myself. Do you remember your first visit to Grove House?"

"Yes."

"Who was the favourite son then, Robert—the hope of the family, the pride of father, mother, and sisters?"

"I should say, Richard Woodleigh."

"What should you say then to Richard Woodleigh having been left two hundred a-year, payable in quarterly instalments, out of a business that puts three times as many thousands into the pockets of a younger brother?"

"Is it credible?"

"I find it so. And I find all my hopes thrown to the ground by a will that must have been written when my father was suffering from temporary derangement. He was always very strange and excitable, if you remember."

"At times."

"You don't remember anything very eccentric or extra-

ordinary in his manner during the time you were his clerk, Robert?"

"I do not."

Richard Woodleigh looked disappointed.

"You must have quarrelled with the old gentleman," I said.

"We had a few words about the college business—trumpetry affair that it was—but was that sufficient to cut me off with two hundred a-year?"

"What does Upton think of it?"

"In my opinion, Robert, he is very glad to get the lion's share. He has been as important as a judge ever since, and as I don't like his manner, I see very little of him."

"It is certainly singular that you should have been left only two hundred a-year—and no reason alleged for it in the will."

"Depend upon it, the old gentleman was mad. I have always had my doubts—have told you of them frequently."

"This is the first time that you have mentioned them to me, Richard."

"No, it is not," he replied sharply, "only your memory plays you false. However, it is ended, and I am a gentleman with limited means."

"Heberdeen tells me you are as happy as a king."

"Oh! yes—I take things as I find them. What can't be cured must be endured, Woodleigh. I find a few friends—a certain brother and sister—look down upon me, but that is natural enough."

"Look down upon you!—nonsense!"

"My dear Robert, it is a cruel fact. If it were not for the affection of my mother, of Constance and the young ones, I should never cross the threshold of Grove House."

"Are you not living at Paddington?"

"No; in bachelor quarters—here's my card, you must call and see me. What day shall we say?—Friday?"

"That is to-morrow."

"The sooner the better. You and I ought to be the best of friends—our natures are similar."

"You will find that statement hard to prove, Richard."

"Not at all. We are both fellows of deep feeling, fond of society, impulsive, perhaps a little headstrong. Now Heberdeen, a very good fellow in his way, don't suit me exactly. He has turned too careful since his engagement to Constance, and prides himself upon being firm, and all that rubbish. You'll come to-morrow?"

"Thank you—I will."

"Well said. You and I have plenty of time on our hands—why should we not spend it together?"

"You are forgetting Miss Heberdeen, Richard."

"Oh! no. I have my lovers' days, but they do not usurp all my leisure."

"What does Miss Heberdeen think of the difference between Upton and yourself?"

"My dear fellow, I never said that there was a difference. Ostensibly, we are the best of friends. We do not want the world to talk about us—it's 'my dear Upton,' 'my dear Dick,' when we meet, and Upton always shakes hands with me very heartily, although he wishes me a hundred miles off. I see through him though, and I hate hypocrisy!"

"I cannot fancy my Cousin Upton a hypocrite, Richard."

"He's an artful fellow, and would deceive anybody. He deceived you once, remember," he said, in a lower tone.

"Deceived me!"

"He pretended to be your friend, didn't he?" said Dick, lightly; "and the sly young rascal was setting Caroline on you all the time—causing her to keep you and Constance apart. Ha! ha! to do him justice, he's sharp enough. But there's my lady-love looking thoughtfully at us and wondering what our long conversation has been about—so amen to it. We shall meet to-morrow, and then we can talk of our troubles, —and laugh at them."

Thus was my intimacy with Richard Woodleigh renewed—strengthened.

We met on the Friday, on the Saturday; we rode out on horseback together on the Sunday. Heberdeen was quite right, he *was* "a frank, easy, good-hearted fellow!"

That is a strange and valuable power—the art of winning upon the heart or fancy of the stranger; of detecting in one meeting what topics, arguments, pleasures, are best to dilate on. Richard Woodleigh was the only being of my acquaintance possessed of the power in a great degree—who used that power, I regret to say, to his own advantage, seldom for a good end, never without a purpose. I could scarce believe he was the same Richard Woodleigh whom I had disliked so long; the same man who grumbled at his fate one Sunday afternoon—or played the part of a grumbler—and borrowed seventy pounds of his younger brother. Only one trait of his character he had not the ability to disguise, and that peeped out in all his

impersonations—namely, the very good opinion he entertained of himself. He was a handsome man, and therefore it was a natural weakness enough. Was there ever a good-looking fellow who was not egotistical?

Mr. Markingham even, shrewd observer as he was, could not always defend himself from the fascinations of Dick Woodleigh, for Dick could talk politics and philosophy, and knew all about the books which were Mr. Markingham's favourites. Still, Markingham was full of his warnings to me, and still studied Dick Woodleigh at every opportunity.

Richard Woodleigh had a delicate part to play with Edmund Heberdeen, and was anxious at first to make him also my friend; he arranged meetings between us at his rooms, and planned little riding and fishing excursions that brought us together, but there was no increase of esteem—our natures were too opposite. Dick gave up the attempt at last.

"It's no use," said he to me one day; "Heberdeen and you will never be the friends that I could wish."

"I am not anxious to cultivate his acquaintance."

"I think he gets prouder than ever," said Dick; "and Count Heberdeen was always of the peacock species. I can manage him well enough, but most people would find the task a difficult one. His sister sees wonderful improvements in him—I don't. Perhaps his improved position under government helps to make him important. He looks forward to being a married man next year, I believe."

"So soon?"

"Constance will be twenty-one in March."

"In February."

"Oh! February, is it—what a good memory you have!"

"Will he be able to support a wife next year then?" I asked.

"Yes. At the Squire's death, the little property left—some two or three hundred a year, I believe—had to be divided between him and his sister; and he thinks his share, added to his clerk's salary, will suffice to begin the world as Benedict."

"Don't you think so?"

"Well, he has turned very mean—taken to saving money, and all that nonsense—perhaps it will. There's Constance's marriage portion too—he will not be so badly off, after all."

"Miss Heberdeen will become Mrs. Woodleigh on the same happy day, I presume?"

"I suppose so," replied Dick; "yet I am of an extravagant turn of mind—how will the money last, I wonder!"

"Mr. Heberdeen tells me that you have turned very steady."

"I can't tell the brother of my future wife everything," said Dick, "especially since he has taken to preaching against his past recklessness. Money will make to itself wings, though."

"True enough."

"I could make a fortune my own way, if I had only a hundred pounds to back a first-rate speculation," said Dick, looking on the ground and biting his nails; "but I can't ask Heberdeen, and Upton, my own brother—he'd see me dead before he lent it me!"

"I think I can lend you a hundred pounds, Dick, for a month or two."

"My dear Robert, a thousand thanks; but I could not think of borrowing your money—though I should be safe to pay it back again. You are very kind; I shall not easily forget the frankness of the offer."

He wrung my hand; the tears of gratitude were swimming in his large dark eyes. How could I forbear to press him to borrow that money I could so easily spare? I did press him, and, after a long struggle, he accepted the loan, wrung my hand again, and said:—

"He had found a true friend at last—one who should, from that day, take the first place in his heart—God bless him!"



CHAPTER II.

WARNINGS.

THE affection I had suddenly evinced for Dick Woodleigh left me no time to think of other friends and acquaintances. I forgot them all, threw them aside for the new and the false. I saw life with Dick Woodleigh; I placed myself under his guidance, and was glad to find scope for my restlessness in the round of pleasure before me.

Mr. Markingham made little comment on my frequent absence from home; he shrugged his shoulders, and thought it was better than my past fits of the horrors. Sometimes he warned me of Dick Woodleigh, but he did not attempt to sever

our dangerous intimacy—was, in fact, rather anxious to see more of him.

“Why does he not come to May Fair if he be so attached to you?” he would say sometimes; “friends of Robert Woodleigh are always friends of mine.”

And Cousin Dick never came to May Fair but Mr. Markingham was at home to receive him, and invariably in the most gracious mood. At those times, Mr. Markingham’s style of conversation—light, flippant, and volatile—surprised me not a little. He talked of the pleasures of life with a zest that would have been more creditable upon the lips of a younger man, expounded questionable doctrines, and asked Dick Woodleigh’s opinion on them, was cynical, over his wine, concerning honour and virtue, laughed heartily at the jests of my cousin, and listened with a flattering intentness to every word that fell from his lips.

“Mr. Markingham has been a wild dog in his day,” Dick once said to me; “has seen as much life as the best of us, or else,” added he shrewdly, “wishes you or I to believe so.”

Dick was evidently suspicious of Mr. Markingham’s attentions, although their object—if they embraced one—naturally puzzled him. He did not readily respond to my patron, even secretly irritated him by taking opposite views of human nature, and preaching on moral subjects with an energy worthy of Mr. Bowden.

And Mr. Bowden, still mourning for the loss of her I was learning to forget, how was I neglecting him! I avoided the house wherein my mother had died, as though it was unhallowed ground—I could not stand in the rooms she had inhabited and not feel myself unworthy of her,—and I shunned him who had been to that mother the best of husbands.

I had never listened to the narrative of my mother’s death; I knew not by whose side she had died, or in what manner—I did not wish to pain myself and others with the sad story, and as for my mother’s last words, I could guess what *they* were! I had no curiosity to know the reason for Miss Bowden’s sudden appearance at her father’s side, cared not to learn who was the first to give way, the strange, stern father, or the stranger, sterner daughter.

Yet Mr. Bowden sought me out with a pertinacity equal to that with which I avoided him, wrote me invitations that I never accepted, and called at May Fair whenever his duties allowed him. Some two months passed away before we met,

however,—before he sat opposite me in Mr. Markingham's drawing-room and preached a sermon that struck home to me. Time and care, which had made my step-father old and grey, had softened in a remarkable degree his natural asperity ; there was less fierceness in his discourse, and more willingness to listen to the discourse of others. He appeared to have inherited some of my mother's gentleness with the sorrows occasioned by her loss, and there was a difficulty in reconciling the present Mr. Bowden with the unfortunate recipient of the blue and yellow shepherdess.

I listened patiently to his sermon, though I objected to many of its heads, but when he began to talk of my mother I started wildly to my feet.

"No, Mr. Bowden," I cried ; "I cannot hear of her—I am fully sensible of the bad son that I have been, and know that I merit all her reproaches."

"She did not reproach you, Robert."

"Her blessing is a reproach to me, for I am undeserving of it—I who could have made her life so happy ! Mr. Bowden, it is very kind to trouble yourself about me——"

"I promised *her*——"

"But you do me no good," I continued, not heeding his interruption ; "you revive a past that I am striving to forget !"

"Ah ! Robert, to forget in what manner ?"

I did not answer.

"If you would only call at my house now and then," he entreated, "I should be very glad to see you, and you would be fulfilling the wishes of a dying mother. There, don't pace the room so violently, I will not urge the request now—another time, when you are more master of yourself. I believe we should be the best of friends ; why not you and I, as well as I and my daughter ?"

"Another time, then," I repeated, anxious to close the interview.

"*She* has come back since your—my poor wife's death," he corrected, "has taken the daughter's place at last. We have talked so much of the past, of our old failings, passions, and weaknesses,—of that which tended to sunder us,—that it has made both more thoughtful and considerate. Oh ! Robert," added he, earnestly, "you should not try to forget the past—it is the memory of it, and the lessons which it teaches, that make us wiser, better men."

"Well, I will talk over the past with you some day—not now."

"That is a promise," said Mr. Bowden, quickly; "I must see that you do not break it. What day shall we say?"

"Leave it to me, Mr. Bowden."

"I suppose I must," said he, rising reluctantly; "but don't put it off altogether, for I am not one to allow that. I have your promise, remember, and if you will not seek me out, why," for the first time during the interview, *bang* came his heavy hand upon the table, "I will seek you out, depend upon it!"

He coloured a little at his vehemence, and said with a faint smile:—

"You see my old impetuosity has not quite departed, Robert. Even a minister of the Gospel loses his self-command at times, and I have been subject to such weakness all my life. However, it is not too late to learn;—had I learned the lesson of forbearance earlier, what a deal of trouble might have been spared me!"

It was a novelty to hear Mr. Bowden reproaching himself—certainly time had improved him. His popularity as a preacher had rendered him less dogmatic and opinionated, and that is not the general result of popularity, is it, oh ye laurel-crowned?

Mr. Bowden gave me one more warning.

"Robert," said he, "neither seeing the world, nor experiencing a great loss in it, appears to have cured you of your reigning fault; I don't believe that the life you are following ever will—for it is not an earnest, or hard-working life. May I ask you—or from my lips may your mother ask you—to be careful whom you choose for a friend! You do not know what a deal depends upon it."

He was turning to depart, when the friend I had chosen, Richard Woodleigh, came, with a friend's privilege, unsummoned into the room.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Robert," said he. "Mr. Markingham told me that you were alone."

He bowed to Mr. Bowden, and made a movement to withdraw.

"Don't go, Richard," I said—"I shall be disengaged in one minute. This is Mr. Woodleigh, Sir," to Mr. Bowden, "a cousin of mine."

Mr. Bowden literally jumped. He was right in his recent remark that he was still liable to lose his self-command, for he changed colour, clenched his hands, and looked at Richard Woodleigh with eyes full of passion.

"Richard, you called him—Richard Woodleigh?"

"Yes," I answered, glancing at my friend, whose colour had

also changed, and whose eyes seemed to flinch a little, despite the attempt they made to meet the fierce looks of my step-father.

"Richard Woodleigh," repeated Mr. Bowden, drawing his breath with difficulty, "and is that man *your* friend?"

"I have the honour to be considered Mr. Robert Woodleigh's friend, Sir," remarked my cousin.

"I addressed myself to this young man, Sir," said Mr. Bowden, indicating me with his hand—"I may address you presently!"

Richard Woodleigh bowed again.

"If *he* be your friend, Robert," said Mr. Bowden, sternly, "my efforts for your welfare are in vain, and I have done with you. A falsar man, or one more cruel and designing, you could not have chosen in the world—I can but say, God help you!"

"This is serious, Mr. Bowden," cried Dick Woodleigh; "will it please you to explain this charge against my character?"

"Character! you have none, Sir," cried Mr. Bowden, furiously. "You are a villain—more, you are a coward!"

"Your age and your profession only shield your insolence, Sir," said Dick, coolly.

"Some months since I made a sacred promise, which, though it hinders me from laying bare your villainy, does not prevent me warning Robert Woodleigh to beware of you. Robert," turning to me, "is my warning taken?"

"I cannot throw aside my friend without a reason," I answered; "that would not be justice, Mr. Bowden."

"I say he is not to be trusted, that he is no fit friend for any man of principle; I don't think, Robert, you have ever heard me lie!"

"No, Sir, but——"

"That will do," said Mr. Bowden gravely—"spare me the humiliation of hearing the son of my poor wife excuse the base and worthless. I wish to hear no more."

Mr. Bowden retired with dignity, and Dick Woodleigh burst into a hearty laugh.

"Is he mad, Robert?"

"Not in the least."

"Surely his success as a red-hot Methodist has turned his head."

"What did he mean about a sacred promise, Dick?" I asked.

"I don't know; it was no sacred promise to me, at any rate."

"Can you imagine a reason for his violence?"

"No."

I took Richard Woodleigh's word, although I had doubted Mr. Bowden's; but the former was my friend, in whom I had confidence! Cousin Dick might be heedless and headstrong—but there was no harm in him—not the least.

So I disregarded the warning of my step-father—had he not often warned me before?—and went my own way in life, arm-in-arm with Dick Woodleigh.

CHAPTER III.

MORE WARNINGS.

ONE bright autumn morning, early in October, Dick Woodleigh and I, inseparable friends, were strolling leisurely through Kensington Gardens. It was a strange place for us to select, Dick Woodleigh not being a lover of Nature or nursery-maids, and preferring, in the raw hours before mid-day, a quiet game at billiards, in which art my cousin had been at great pains to instruct me, and had even introduced me to a few friends of his, who had instructed me too, and won my money in a very gentlemanly manner. But Richard Woodleigh, that particular morning, was not in the humour for billiards, and proposed, with a yawn, a walk before luncheon; and, the walk having been extended, we arrived, whether by accident or design matters not, at the fair gardens of Kensington.

"Let us have another stroll down this avenue, Robert," said my cousin, when I had begun to exhibit some symptoms of weariness; "this is a favourite haunt of mine when a poetical fit attacks me."

"Which is not very often."

"More often than you think," said Dick; "for I was always of a reflective, sentimental turn. Are you in a hurry?"

"No."

"Then don't walk fast, there's a good fellow; that late supper of yours last night has nearly knocked me up."

I suited my pace to his own, and listened to Richard Woodleigh's conversation, which, that morning, was decidedly dull and insipid. At the end of the walk, Dick paused and looked round him.

"Shall we return home?" I asked.

"I am at your service," he said; "my fit of rurality is over, and now for any life in London which suits your inclination best. One moment, Robert; surely we ought to know those ladies in mourning."

"Yes, yes, I know them," said I, hastily disengaging my arm from my cousin's, "and it will be as well for me to retire."

"For what reason?" asked Dick. "Surely you are not afraid of meeting your friends and relations."

"I have kept away so long, Richard, that I have not the courage to face them now."

"It's too late—they have seen us and there is no escape for you, old fellow," said Dick; "make the best of it, Robert, it's not a dreadful thing to face an old sweetheart."

"Not very dreadful," I answered with a sickly smile; "I have faced worse dangers in Naples."

Dick Woodleigh and I advanced towards the ladies, and I could not help experiencing a certain amount of nervousness as the distance grew less between me and those whom I had sought to forget.

We were face to face at last, and I was shaking hands with my aunt and cousins, and hoping they were well.

My aunt was looking as pale and thin as ever, and if time and trouble had not added to her weakness, they had, at least, increased her nervousness, for even the sudden meeting with her son and nephew was a shock to her which caused her to cling hastily to the arms of her daughters.

"Oh! Dick, my dear lad, I was not prepared to meet you this morning—what a fright you have given me! Has anything happened?"

"Happened, mother? No. Robert and I have been strolling here to kill time, that is all."

"And can it be really you, Robert? What a difference two years make in a growing lad, to be sure. Only two years ago since—ahem!"

"I did not expect to find you walking in Kensington Gardens, aunt," I remarked.

"Your cousins *will* bring me into the fresh air, Robert," said my aunt, "although it's against my will. I would rather stay at home."

"You give way too much, mother," said Dick, "and that will never do. Come, girls, talk to your cousin and leave mother to me—how do you think time has served these young ladies, Robert?"

"I see little difference in them," I replied, looking from Caroline to Constance, and from Constance to my youngest cousin, Mary—"except in Mary here. I left her a child, I find her budding into womanhood."

Mary blushed as we strolled together down the avenue, Aunt Woodleigh a few yards in advance, leaning on Dick's arm.

Constance Woodleigh betrayed no want of self-possession during our meeting—she was as calm and lady-like as her elder sister. That day, in the summer time, when I had proposed to her in the very face of despair, was a day to be forgotten, and she could welcome me now with a bright smile, knowing all misconceptions were ended.

"And you have never called at Grove House since your return from the continent," said Constance; "was it your intention, Cousin Robert, to forget all your relations?"

"Surely not," I answered; "and to find me with your brother Richard is sufficient answer to the question."

"Richard has been speaking of you lately," said Caroline; "telling us of the friendship that has sprung up between you and him. Things come strangely round, Robert. I used to fancy once that you would be my brother Upton's friend."

"Upton thought so too," added Mary,

"He is well, I hope," I asked coldly, for I remembered Dick's assertion that he had helped to deceive me.

"Quite well," replied Caroline, with that sharp, flashing glance which was only common to her and the brother we spoke of. "I thought that you had forgotten him."

"Oh! no, I never forget my friends."

"You change them sometimes, Robert."

"They change, not I!" was my answer.

"May I ask, Robert, how long you have been Richard's friend?" said Caroline.

"It is nearly a year ago since we met in Naples."

"So long as that," she murmured; "that was before"—her face shadowing—"our loss?"

"Yes. I was with him when the summons to return arrived."

"I was not aware of that. You were with him *then*?" she asked, anxiously.

"He was at my hotel when the sad news reached him."

"Did he give way much?"

"He was agitated, but I scarcely saw him a moment; he left for England that day."

"And you have met again, and are the most intimate of friends?"

"Yes; who could help being the friend of one so good-hearted and clever—one so full of life and high spirits, who looks on the bright side of everything and never despairs? I have lost all my old fits of gloom in his society."

"Dear Dick," said Constance; "he is everybody's favourite; I don't believe he ever had an enemy."

"Nevertheless, he has too many false friends, Constance," said Caroline.

"But Dick is not one to be easily led away, Carry."

"No, *he* is not," said Caroline, with a slight emphasis on the pronoun; "for he has seen a great deal of the world—the dark as well as the bright side. It is well he is so good-hearted," she added; "for were Richard selfish, vain, unprincipled—as some men are—his friends would need a warning."

"Bad men betray themselves, sister," said Constance.

"Not always," was the reply; "seldom till it is too late for the victim to escape from their snare. What a victim now," with a curious smile, "would Cousin Robert make!"

"Am I so easily deceived, then?" I asked.

"You are easily flattered, Robert, very impulsive, apt to obey your own will without much reflection as to future consequences, inclined to form new friends, and," she added, after a slight pause, "to forget the old ones."

"A fine portrait, Caroline," I answered, "but drawn too hastily. You have forgotten something."

"What is that?"

"That it is the portrait of a boy of nineteen—of what has been! Between nineteen and twenty-one, there has been opportunity for change."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so," she said, absently; "so you are of age, Robert?"

"Next month."

"Do you intend to follow any profession?"

"I think not."

"You are very young to give up struggling for life's prizes."

"I have no need to struggle for them—why should I exert myself unnecessarily?"

"Work is a very good thing, even for a gentleman," said Caroline, quietly; "you will find many an evil thought and unjust resolve melt away, when there is something in the distance worth striving for."

"I believe my Cousin Richard is not striving for ——"

"I am speaking of you, not Richard," she interrupted, with no little sharpness.

"I am flattered by your interest."

Caroline coloured, and for a moment seemed disposed to leave me and rejoin her mother.

"I am schooling you too harshly, perhaps," she said, after a pause; "addressing in too personal a manner a relation who has only one month more of boyhood to waste. You must pardon me, Robert, but I was thinking of one who would have urged you more earnestly had she lived."

"You mean——"

"Your mother."

"What made you think of her, Miss Woodleigh?" I asked.

"She has been in my thoughts a great deal lately," replied Caroline.

"I do not understand."

"Caroline nursed your poor mother in her last illness," explained Constance.

"Were you at my mother's side when—when she died, Caroline?"

"Yes," she answered sadly.

"All this seems very strange to me."

"The time of affliction tests real friendship," said Caroline; "and in our trouble your mother was very kind to us. Although years had passed since our meeting, although coldness or indifference had arisen, she forgot all that and came to soothe us in our grief, and soften the bitterness of our loss. She was a true Christian."

My lip quivered, but I did not answer.

"When a few more weeks stretched her on a bed of sickness, it was my duty to watch her in return—to comfort her in her distress, to reconcile her to parting from the world without a word, or a look from you."

"And was she reconciled?" I asked.

"She died happy—full of hope in her son's future!"

"In my future!" I cried; "oh, don't tell me any more, Caroline—for every word's a stab!"

I seized her hand and pressed it for a moment in my own.

"God bless you for past kindness, Caroline," I said; "you must have thought me an ungrateful fellow not to thank you. It was not ingratitude, but ignorance."

"Has not your step-father mentioned my name to you, Robert?"

"I have studiously shunned a painful narrative," I replied. "I could not hear from him a word concerning it. One day in the future, when I can listen better, will you tell me all?"

"Yes, if you wish it," she answered; "if we should meet again."

"Do our paths lie so wide asunder, then?"

"You do not seek to find us out. Other friends and pursuits have altered you."

Constance had dropped a few paces back with her younger sister, and I could say with a flushed cheek:—

"Is it wise of me to come again to Grove House?"

"Doubtless you have forgotten the past and its follies," she replied; "you are a man of the world now!"

"And romance is not the main commodity in which the world deals, is it, Caroline?"

"No, or the world would get on badly, I fear. An early day then, Robert, you will come and see Upton?"

"Leaving my boyish follies behind?" I added, with a laugh.

"Ah! yes, or you had better stop away for ever!"

Richard and his mother had reached the end of the avenue, and were waiting for us to join them. Aunt Woodleigh and her son were talking earnestly as we advanced, and I heard her say in a low voice:—

"Certainly I shall be glad to see him. I was always glad to see him, Richard. When shall I ask him?"

"Now," muttered Richard Woodleigh.

When we were standing in a little group together, Aunt Woodleigh gave me an invitation to Grove House that evening; Mr. Heberdeen and his sister had promised to look in; Upton would be home early, and she hoped no previous engagement would prevent me.

As I bowed an acceptance to Aunt Woodleigh's invitation, Caroline looked thoughtfully at Cousin Dick. She was evidently puzzled with her brother's desire to see me at Grove House, was vexed that no sufficient reason for his anxiety suggested itself. Did she mistrust him, then?—was there a reason, or had there ever been a reason for suspecting him who had been cut off with two hundred a-year? Was there something in the background concerning him known to Caroline—perhaps to Caroline alone—which rendered her distrustful of her brother's motives, and made many words that fell from her lips

that day sound like faint echoes of Mr. Bowden's warning? There was a certain distance between the two eldest children of Aunt Woodleigh, I saw that when they parted; when the cold bow was exchanged, and the frown deepened on Dick's handsome face as he turned hastily—almost angrily—away.

When Richard and I were proceeding home together, he said suddenly :—

“So Caroline has persuaded you to join them at Paddington again?”

“Yes.”

“What does *she* wish it for?” he muttered; “what object can she have in seeing the old lover of her sister—him she deluded and kept such sharp watch over—back again?”

“She trusts in me not to bring my boyish follies to Grove House once more; better to stop away for ever than do that, she says.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! there is something more than that in the background,” observed Dick, savagely; “Caroline is a wily maiden, who is never without a scheme in her head to advance her own interest and importance.”

“You misjudge her, Dick.”

“You do not know her,” he answered; “you have not seen her grow up cunning and deceitful from her cradle, as I have. She is my sister; but I warn you of her.”

“Why, Richard, this is hallucination.”

“You are my friend, and I must put you on your guard,” said Dick; “for you will find her try to set you against me! You will hear remarks that only suggest doubt, but which you cannot keep from rankling in your mind; you will discover her curious about me and yourself, about our pursuits and pleasures, anxious to know everybody's business—a true woman!”

“Dick, Dick, remember that she is your sister!”

“I remember it,” replied he; “God knows it is painful for me to tear aside the veil which hides the evil in her nature; I do it for your own sake, and you must not blame your friend.”

“I think that you are mistaken.”

“Still doubtful of my word,” said Dick; “well, then, I will tell you all!”

He was deeply affected, or he was a clever actor. His chest heaved, his eyes swam in tears, and his voice was thick and

broken. Even his hand shook nervously as it rested for an instant on my arm.

"I can rely on you to keep this secret, Robert."

"Is it necessary that I should hear it?"

"For your better knowledge of human nature—for the sake of justifying the language I have used—it is."

"Proceed, then. I will not abuse your confidence."

"Robert," said he, speaking at first with difficulty, and striving to subdue his emotion, "Caroline Woodleigh is a worldly woman, selfish, designing, and fond of money. When she was young, she was like no other child; she did not care for play with her younger brothers and sisters, she sat aloof by her father's side, and feigned to study him. It was the beginning of a deep game, and she played well; she wound herself like a serpent round that father's heart, and the result was what she had striven for all her life—an influence over him which lasted till his death. That influence," he said, between his set teeth, "was exerted against me. She showed in glaring colours all my faults, follies and extravagance; she heightened them in every way; she gleaned from various sources a hundred lying stories which had been circulated against me in London and at Oxford, and did all this so artfully, so purely out of regard for my welfare, and with such a loving sister's face turned to me all the while! How did it end? God be my witness, if she did not, on my father's dying bed, take advantage of his weakness to induce him to alter his will and leave me but two hundred a-year out of his large fortune."

"Can it be possible?"

"I stand a proof of the possibility of the thing," he answered, with a bitter laugh; "my hopes in life blighted by a crafty woman! And yet I still call her sister, touch her hand in friendship, for the sake of my poor mother."

The impression left on me by this narrative did not appear to please Dick Woodleigh, for he could not refrain from a hasty expression of his disappointment.

"Don't you believe me now?" he cried, vehemently—"have I not sworn it solemnly?"

"There must be some great mistake, Richard," I said; "you have been deceived by a false friend, or there is something more behind the curtain than will ever come to light."

"What do you mean?" asked Richard Woodleigh.

"That there is a reason for all this unexplained by your

sister, your father, or yourself. Have you spoken with Caroline since my uncle's death ? ”

Cousin Dick gave another start—more evident the second time—before he answered moodily :—

“ I have heard her version of the story, and even hers betrays no great discrepancy. She owns to *advising* him on his death-bed, and has the coolness to assure me that my father acted for the best. But let it rest—it is a strange tale, and you are the only one to whom I have related a word. Better to have kept it back from you than to have been told it was a fiction ! ”

“ I did not tell you so, Richard,” I said ; “ if I have even implied so, I must ask your pardon. You are still suffering from the bitterness of your disappointment, and fancy that enemies have been at work behind your back. Your wrongs I believe in, but I think you are mistaken in the author of them, or in the reasons which brought those wrongs upon you.”

“ Shall I tell you something more in proof of Caroline's duplicity ? ” said he, frowning ; “ *that* is all I want to prove to you.”

“ Well.”

“ Did she speak of Mr. Bowden to-day ? ”

“ She spoke of my mother—of tending her in her last illness.”

“ She is not backward in parading her own virtues,” said Dick ; “ and she knew well enough what would make an impression upon Robert Woodleigh.”

“ Why should she seek to impress me, Richard ? ”

“ That puzzles me,” he answered ; “ but we shall find out in time.”

“ And this further proof of her duplicity ? ”

“ Is this. For another reason, not quite so deeply hidden, she has turned your step-father against me—a man whom I have seen but once in my life. Do you see the design woven in the dark mind there ? ”

I thought of Mr. Bowden's indignation at discovering a friend of mine in Richard Woodleigh, of his warning, his mention of the sacred promise he had made a *few months* since to some one whose name did not transpire—it was all strange and perplexing, and there seemed no clue to the mystery. And yet was I possessed of so little penetration as to have been deceived in Caroline Woodleigh all my life ?

Cousin Dick, watching every sign upon my troubled face, said :—

“ Ah ! it is a hard thing to believe, but it is a stern fact, and

apparent as noonday. There is a certain amount of evil in every family, and one unlucky member comes in sometimes for more than a fair share. Perhaps he or she cannot help it—it may be destiny.”

“Are you a fatalist, Dick?”

“I fancy, now and then,” said he gloomily, “that there is a fate for each of us, a certain fate, not to be altered by any action of our own, or changed by any prayers, efforts at repentance, anything! Yet, no matter the fate, it is as well to beware.”

“Even of Caroline Woodleigh?” I asked jestingly.

“Ay, even of her,” said he, grinding his white teeth together; “she is the woman in the old play, who—

‘Would have made a most rare Jesuit;
She can prevaricate on anything!’”



CHAPTER IV

A GAME AT CHESS.

It was striking six when we were before Grove House, and under the familiar portico beneath which I had indulged many vain and foolish thoughts.

Thoughts which were gone now, I fancied; gone, never to come back. The hour was past, the time had glided by, I could return heart-whole to the side of my cousin, and gaze calmly at her who had been, once upon a time, the heroine of my own love-story!

My aunt and cousins were at tea in the drawing-room, and a hasty glance round sufficed to show me that young Heberdeen and his sister had not yet arrived.

“Dear me,” said my aunt, nearly dropping her cup into her lap at the announcement of our names; “I had no idea you meant to call so early, Richard—I thought you mentioned eight o’clock.”

“Six o’clock, mother,” replied Dick; “we dined early in order to arrive in time for tea at Grove House. Well, Upton, how are you?”

Upton had already risen from the arm-chair—the old arm-chair of his father, that he had taken as his right, and which

had become his favourite seat—and crossed the room towards us.

“Pretty well, I thank you, Dick,” answered his younger brother, and then turning to me,—“so the runaway returns again. I am very glad to see you, Robert.”

“If Upton Woodleigh be a hypocrite,” I thought, as I received the hearty pressure of his hand, “he is one of the finest specimens I have ever met with in my life!” But looking into his face, so frank and open—so manly and so full of thought, too—I could not credit that it was the face of a false friend, despite the many hints of his treachery which Cousin Dick had suggested. And yet, in the days gone by, when he stood between me and Constance, when his study seemed to be to keep me from her—the days when I followed the shadows and cried like a child because they eluded my grasp! I turned from him hastily—yes, he had deceived me!

“Really these are the old times again,” remarked my aunt, when Cousin Dick and I were seated at the tea-table; “there is only Johnny to come back from boarding-school and make the family party complete—quite com——”

She stopped. There was a portrait on the wall which spoke of the great gap in the home circle, not of its completeness. Aunt Woodleigh was silent for a long time afterwards.

Oh! the portraits on the wall, what pride they rebuke in us, what lessons they teach, what memories they conjure up!

Though the confessions with which Dick Woodleigh had favoured me had rendered me more observant that evening, I could not detect in his brother Upton any of that hypocrisy of which he had complained. Upton was evidently glad to see his brother, who was in the best of spirits and very unlike the gloomy being who had told me his extraordinary story in Kensington Gardens. Dick was the life of that little family party, he had many anecdotes to tell, and many witty observations to make—certainly his sorrows were not weighing him down.

“Not much difference in Dick, is there Robert?” asked Upton, after we had sat together some time and talked of the past office days; “nothing seems to depress him.”

“He has not the cares of business on his mind,” said I.

“Better if he had, perhaps,” replied Upton; “you know my ideas of business; a first-rate thing for the constitution, the mind, and the morals. Dick should have taken to railway work and contracts early in life.”

"It is not too late to make him *junior* partner."

Upton's countenance changed.

"It is out of my power, Robert."

"Indeed," said I, with a laugh; "what spell renders Upton Woodleigh powerless?"

"A potent one," replied Upton, rather taken aback by my laugh; "I thought you were aware of it, being Dick's most intimate friend."

"No."

"Has not Dick mentioned anything concerning family matters to you?" he asked in a lower tone.

"He has spoken of my uncle's will."

"It is that will which hinders me from offering Dick a share in the business," said Upton; "my father's heart was in his work, and he appears to have mistrusted Dick's power or inclination to assist in it—Dick, too, who was always so clever!"

"And always his favourite son."

"Yes," remarked Upton, thoughtfully; "so we fancied, at least. Still, I think there was a difference between him and Dick that was never quite explained, and there is always something to widen the breach when absence and ill-will keep the best friends apart. I have not been able to solve the mystery of Dick's legacy, for my father never opened his lips to me on the subject. At times I am wicked enough to fancy that my father was the dupe of a designing enemy of Dick's—and yet he was too shrewd to be easily imposed on."

A designing enemy! Was Upton about to confirm his brother's words? Almost unconsciously, I looked towards Caroline, sitting, book in hand, half hidden by the window curtains. At one glance of the calm face, all my suspicion recoiled, darted away from its object as flame flashes back from the diamond.

"How is your step-father?" asked Upton, anxious to change the subject.

"Very well, I believe."

"How lonely he must be, despite his great popularity," said Upton; "for what is the good of being a famous or a lucky man, if we have no loved one beside us to share in our triumphs?"

"Not much good, I fear; still, Mr. Bowden is not quite desolate now his daughter has returned to——"

"Daughter!" cried Upton, "you don't mean that Miss Bowden has come back?"

"Miss Bowden has been some months at her father's house, I believe."

Upton jumped from his seat with all his father's excitability, paced the room once or twice, to the surprise of his sisters and dismay of his mother, stopped at last, and said :—

"Miss Bowden is found!—why didn't some one tell me before? Why am I always the last," he asked, angrily, "to be told anything?"

But Upton's communication was received with equal astonishment by my cousins, and Aunt Woodleigh had to lie back in her chair and take refuge in smelling-salts. The only one apparently unconcerned by the revelation was the handsome man opposite, with the dark eyes, who took up the book which Caroline had laid aside, and commenced reading diligently from the middle of the story.

"Shall we go to-morrow and see her, Carry?" said Constance, eagerly.

"It is scarcely our duty to seek Miss Bowden out, after the studied silence which it has pleased her to adopt," answered Caroline, gravely. "Miss Bowden has her pride, we have ours. If she will not condescend to explain the reasons for her departure from our house, that abrupt, and to us contemptuous withdrawal, must still remain an insult."

"Miss Bowden would not insult any one intentionally," said Mary, with some spirit; "you judge her too severely, Carry."

"I think with Caroline," remarked Upton, with a serious expression of countenance, "that her motives for leaving us require an explanation, and that we have a right to demand one. I'll go myself to-morrow, that is," he added, turning very red, as several pairs of wondering eyes were fixed in his direction—"if nobody else will go, of course."

"Perhaps I'll go myself," said Aunt Woodleigh; "I am sure Miss Bowden would have no objection to make me her confidant."

"I have an objection, mamma," said Caroline; "and knowing how every incident out of the common way excites you, I must interdict the interview."

"Very well, my dear," said Aunt Woodleigh, giving way at once; "you know what is best for me. Perhaps it would disturb me a little!"

"And we cannot afford to have our mother disturbed for all the clever governesses in the world," said Caroline, laying her hand with a daughter's fondness on her mother's—"better to

live beneath a hundred misconceptions than to let the removal of them rob you of your strength."

"My dear, thoughtful Carry," replied the mother, "I think you would keep everything from me for fear of disturbing me—good news and bad news."

"Bad news I should never tell you, mother."

She looked for a moment at her brother, but he had become absorbed in the book, and was turning page after page in an eager manner.

"Are we to give up Miss Bowden, then," said Constance, "before the mystery is cleared? That is not just, Carry. I am sure the reasons which induced Miss Bowden to leave us were urgent; for, with all her eccentricities, she was attached to the family."

"Well, then, you and I will call on Miss Bowden," said Caroline, laughing; "the vote is carried, and I stand in the minority."

"That is well settled, Carry," said Upton; "but you must mind how you go to work."

"Go to work, Upton?" repeated Caroline.

"Why, she is of rather a hasty disposition, and if you don't humour her a little to begin with, you'll—what are you laughing at?"

"An odd thought of mine," replied his eldest sister.

"It's not etiquette of a first-class description to indulge in *odd* thoughts when an individual is giving valuable advice," said Upton, very red again; "but as you know Miss Bowden better than I do, we'll stop the discussion. Come, Dick, put that book down and amuse the company, will you?"

Dick laid the book on the table, and sat for a moment staring at it.

"That is a queer book," he said at last; "whose is it?"

"Mine," said Caroline.

"I mean, who wrote it—an old author or a new one?"

"A new one, I believe," replied his sister; "there is no name on the title-page."

Dick took up the book once more, turned to the title-page, replaced it on the table, stared at it again.

"What work is it, Richard?" I asked. "Is it a novel?"

"It will pass for one," he replied; "*is* one, I suppose."

"Come, Dick, you are a judge of books," said Upton; "a regular star in the dark in the way of criticism—what do you

think of it? The girls are in raptures, but girls' opinions on the 'last new novel' don't go for much in the literary world."

"They help to sell the book though," added Constance.

"I have not read much of the work," observed Dick Woodleigh.

"More than those critics who have praised or condemned it, I'll lay a wager," said Upton.

"I don't admire the title, the subject, or the style," was Dick's opinion at last; "it's a book that will never sell. It's too satirical."

"That is the third edition," said Caroline, quietly.

"Ah! the publishers have printed a new title-page," said Dick, affecting a yawn; "a book of that stamp would never fairly go down the throat of the public, even in these novel-reading times. What a title—'BEHIND THE MASK!' The authoress—for it's a woman by the spite in it—had some object of envy or malice in her mind when she drew the villain of the story, and has laid the colours on thick enough. One cannot be always 'behind the mask.'"

"The mask drops in the last chapter," remarked Caroline.

"Ah! I have not read that," replied Dick, "and I never shall. How late Heberdeen is!"

"And Miss Heberdeen too," said Upton, with a sly look in his brother's direction. "Come, Caroline, how are we to celebrate the return of our prodigal cousin? He's sitting here as dull as an owl for want of amusement. Mother, will the piano disturb you?"

"Not in the least, my dear," answered my obliging aunt.

"Then one of you girls will perhaps favour us with a ballad?" suggested Upton.

Constance Woodleigh was the first to run her white fingers over the keys of the piano, and it was her sweet clear voice that a few moments afterwards was ringing in the chamber, vibrating through my heart. It was an old Scotch ballad that in the days of my dreaming I had heard her sing—perhaps had loved her more for singing it—and it conjured up a thousand memories. I remembered the last time that ballad was sung, nearly three years ago, in the summer time, when I had built anew my castle in the air and peopled it with phantoms. They did not all wear black dresses then!

I was thinking of that past, and turning the leaves of the music book for Constance, as I had turned them with a heart

full of love three years ago, when Mr. Heberdeen and his sister were announced.

"Finish the ballad, Constance," said Dick, "and pay your respects to your friends afterwards. We cannot let the ladies off with half a song, can we, Heberdeen?"

"That would be marring the harmony of the evening," replied Heberdeen, in rather a deep voice. Mr. Heberdeen stood near the door, waiting patiently for the conclusion of the ballad, his black eyes taking in the graceful figure of his betrothed at the piano, and surveying steadily the Cousin Robert who was so courteous and attentive. When the ballad was finished, Mr. Heberdeen and sister were received with all due honour, and the blushing Constance rose to greet her lover.

There was the slightest shade of discontent on the brow of Edmund Heberdeen, Esq., despite the smile and the "Well, Constance," which accompanied the pressure of her hand, and there was a deeper shading over the eyes, and not the least smile in the world on his face, as we shook hands together fishily.

"Hope that you are quite well, Mr. Heberdeen?"

"Thank you," replied that gentleman, without affording me the requisite information.

I met with a warmer reception from his sister. She was glad to see me, had questions to ask concerning the health of Mr. Markingham, and a few remarks to make upon the inexhaustible weather. The first shock of the great loss was over, but the traces were still visible on the pale but beautiful face of her who had suffered.

Dick Woodleigh was soon devoting himself to Miss Heberdeen, and apparently paying little attention to the rest of his mother's guests. The charm of his manner exerted its influence over Miss Heberdeen, and that sad expression of features, which had almost become habitual with her, was replaced by the smiling looks befitting life in its spring.

I had plenty of leisure for observation that evening, sitting between Upton and his mother, and not deeply interested in their conversation; there were two figures in the recess of the window bending over a chess-board, who formed the principal subject of attraction, and my eyes would wander in their direction, and my thoughts stray thitherward also.

"What a lucky fellow to have gained the love of my sunny-faced cousin," I thought. "I wonder whether he is deserving of her after all!" He was a good-looking man, but where lay

the charm that had stolen her heart in the early days of her maidenhood? Was I so greatly his inferior—I who had been first in the lists!—that my boy-passion could not touch her heart?—and yet his had the power to rouse into existence all the warm feelings attendant on the first love of woman.

Was Cousin Dick right—had Upton and Caroline at one time been fearful of Constance's firmness, awake to the danger of my silent, earnest attention winning its way to her heart, and had they, in their natural anxiety, stood between me and her, and separated us for ever? Ay, for ever, was it not, for the proud rival was at her side, and she was happy in his smiles!

Had I not forgotten her, then—had time and travel only lessened the passion of youth, not extinguished it, and was I, in the face of despair, to entertain all my past follies? "No, no," was my inward exclamation, "I will not nurse that thought till it again grows the giant which no reason can quell. I have seen the world since my disappointment, and I was only a boy when I set my heart on my cousin. Let me not act worse than a boy now manhood has come, and the prize which I sought has been gained by another!"

The game at chess was ended, and there was some laughing between the lovers at the result.

"You lost that game in a very clumsy manner, Edmund," I heard Constance say, "and indeed I have my suspicions that you allowed me to win it."

"Chess-players never lose a game if they can help it," replied Heberdeen, evasively.

"What! is that game finished already?" asked Dick, suddenly becoming alive to passing events.

"Yes," answered Heberdeen; "your sister is the victor."

"Ah! she improves rapidly in the royal game," remarked Richard Woodleigh; "Robert," turning to me, "you are a chess-player—why don't you enter the lists against the lady with the laurels?"

"Mr. Heberdeen has a right to claim his revenge," I replied, feeling myself blush in an unaccountable manner.

"Oh! Ned is tired of chess—I can see that by his formidable yawning. Constance, why don't you challenge this Philidor of a cousin?"

"Is Robert a good chess-player?"

"So Mr. Markingham tells me."

"Mr. Markingham must entertain no very mean opinion of

his own abilities, then," was my answer ; "for he gives me the odds of a knight."

Constance Woodleigh evinced some little embarrassment, and I saw one or two shy inquiring glances directed to her late adversary, who was looking steadily in the contrary direction. My Aunt Woodleigh made matters worse too by saying :—

"She was sure Constance and I would make a capital match," an observation at which Dick laughed heartily, and said :—

"At chess, mother, of course !" which second remark caused the black eyebrows of Edmund Heberdeen to lower a little more as he rose from his seat and looked towards me.

"Now, Mr. Woodleigh, your cousin is anxiously waiting for you," he said with no small acerbity.

I saw Constance's cheeks flush as she bent over the board, and the little hand shake as it arranged the pieces on their respective squares, and I thought Mr. Heberdeen might be a very honourable and gentlemanly man, and yet be, notwithstanding, a jealous, ill-tempered fellow. Perhaps it was natural enough that he should object to my taking his place and playing chess with a lady to whom I had once professed an attachment—was he aware of that fact?—but it was not very complimentary to scowl at me in a bravo-like fashion and look as if he could eat me. My own temper—not remarkably docile, as the reader is aware—was disturbed by his dark looks, and I who, for his sake, had not been anxious to monopolise the attention of his betrothed, now resolved to play chess with Cousin Constance just as long as she or time would permit me.

It was a tedious game, despite my cousin's efforts to make short work of it, and sacrifice queen, rooks, knights, everything on the board, in fact, in the most reckless and inconsiderate manner. I was not disposed to win the game at once and let her hasten to the side of that lover who had treated me with more of his old hauteur than he had exhibited since the pic-nic in Richmond Park. I was a long while considering my moves, slow and cautious in manœuvring my men, oblivious to the startling fact of my adversary's queen attempting suicide every half-dozen moves, and regardless of the eligible opportunities of checkmate which were kindly and profusely offered me.

Heberdeen talked to my aunt and cousins in an easy manner, laughed—rather loudly, perhaps—at Upton's little efforts at

pleasantry, and kept glancing at me and Constance out of the corners of his eyes. If he saw anything of our game from his post of observation, he must have thought Mr. Markingham's opinion of my chess skill exceedingly over-rated, for there was a rook of Constance's *en prise*, and about four distinct methods of mating, all of which I overlooked in my extreme anxiety to take care of my pawns.

Considering Heberdeen's dignified airs, and the pleasure it was to have my pretty cousin near me, it was certainly creditable on my part to put a sudden end to the game for the sake of sparing the feelings of my rival and Constance. I don't know that I was thanked for it—lovers are ungrateful beings—but I had, at least, the satisfaction of thinking that a good action was its own reward, when I was sitting once more by the side of Aunt Woodleigh and listening to a long-winded story about her liver-complaint.

The rest of the evening was not a pleasant one to me, did not even pass over placidly with Constance and her lover. Whilst my aunt prosed over her ailments, and I said "yes," "no," or "indeed," as the case might require it, I was aware of a few signs of discontent at no great distance. Heberdeen was grave and taciturn, and all Constance's smiles did not tend much to soften him.

The stately fit lasted the whole of the evening, and he took his bad tempers with him from the drawing-room into the hall.

Heberdeen, his sister, Dick Woodleigh, and I were in the hall, bidding good-night to Upton, when a rough bundle of something heaped on the great mat before the door stirred, rose, shook itself, assumed the shape of a wiry terrier, looked at me and growled.

Upton laughed.

"He remembers you, Robert."

"I hope not," I answered, "or I shall be ashamed to look him in the face."

"Down, Sir!" cried Heberdeen, sharply.

The dog crouched at the feet of his master, and Heberdeen stooped over him and patted his rough coat.

"He's an old servant, faithful to the last," he muttered.

"Do you think that he remembers my cousin here, Mr. Heberdeen?" asked Upton.

"Possibly," was the response; "for, like his master, he does not easily forget his friends or—his enemies!"

CHAPTER V

OF AGE.

AFTER my game at chess with Constance Woodleigh, my visits to Grove House, Paddington, were not few and far between. Cousin Dick, overflowing with filial affection, was anxious to see his mother three or four times a-week, and I, who accompanied him as a matter of course, had never a reason to complain of my reception. Forming one of the home circle again, and seeing my cousins constantly, was to produce one effect for which Richard Woodleigh had not bargained,—namely, to renew my affection for every member of the family. There was no mistrusting Upton or his sister Caroline for long; the frankness of their natures set aside all doubts. Caroline was a prudent girl, but she was not a designing one; a thoughtful sister, an affectionate daughter, a careful house-keeper, there was something every day that brought her virtues to the light. The only thing to perplex me was the difference between her and her brother Richard, and that did not lessen with the lapse of time. Had I not listened to Dick's confession in Kensington Gardens, it is probable that the coldness existing between the elder children of the Woodleighs would have passed unnoticed, it was so little evident to my cousins, and so well disguised before the nervous mother. They joined in conversation together, ostensibly they were the best of friends, and there was no sign upon the surface of what was working in their hearts. My confidence in Dick Woodleigh was not shaken as my esteem for Caroline increased; I could no more believe my new friend had spoken falsely, than that Caroline had helped to rob him of his birthright, and I became convinced that a calm, deliberate explanation between them would set at rest all mistakes for ever. "If I can be the means of bringing about that reconciliation," I thought, "my visits to Grove House will not have been made in vain." It may well be supposed that those visits were not regarded with a complaisant eye by Edmund Heberdeen, although it was not often that we met together at Grove House, Richard Woodleigh being partial to morning or afternoon calls, when Heberdeen was at work over his office-books. Still we crossed each

other's path occasionally, and each meeting was characterised by a greater degree of stiffness and reserve. And yet, for his sake, believing my cause was hopeless, I let no sign of the old folly betray me to Constance Woodleigh—was even uncertain if that folly belonged to the present. And yet, when deceived by my equanimity, and believing that no false hopes could be raised in my breast, she became the cousin again, kind, unaffected and sisterly, what a power there was in her smiles to melt the frost at my heart! After our first meeting at Grove House, Edmund Heberdeen exhibited no signs of his jealousy to Constance; his pride helped to keep all unamiable feelings in the background, albeit they smouldered, took fresh fuel, smouldered again, and needed but a little out of the common way to burst into a blaze. His contumelious bearing tempted me once or twice to retaliate, and pay more attention to Constance Woodleigh than was absolutely necessary; but I found it was one thing to give pain in the heat of temper, and another, to wound the feelings in a cold-blooded manner. I could see at a glance that Constance Woodleigh was as much his hope as she had ever been mine; that his passion was earnest and deep, and showed itself in every word and look, and I had not sufficient evil in my nature to make that love his torment. For what he suffered then he had but himself to blame—I did not seek to shut the light from his path; he made all dark by his own jealous nature.

Well, jealousy is a human weakness, and I don't set myself up as a reformer of it, or point to Edmund Heberdeen as a striking example. He who loves deeply is generally a selfish and inconsistent mortal, taking alarm at one look of the stranger, and seeing love and murder under the most innocent glances. That is a very pure, holy love, indeed, that has not a few black attendants in the shape of suspicion, jealousy, &c., in its train—a love that belongs to something brighter and better than this world. There may be some happy couples whose course of love running smooth has borne them straight to the altar, but the Black Pages were behind them, notwithstanding; they were watching every look, waiting for the one mistaken act, thoughtless word, to tumble one over the other into sight and play old Harry with the feelings!

Dick Woodleigh steered his way cleverly between Heberdeen and myself; he did not lose our friendship, although he made each of us doubtful whom he really preferred. He feigned a liking to Heberdeen in my presence, and yet let me understand

that that young gentleman was not exactly the fellow after his own heart that I was ; talked of his merits, yet condemned his pride ; spoke of his virtues and vanities in one breath, said he was all that was clever and industrious, "but he was not," looking at me, "quite the man to make his dear sister Constance a good husband !"

I have already remarked that Caroline Woodleigh was a prudent girl ; about the end of October, she gave me an instance of her carefulness. We were standing at the window of the drawing-room, looking into the garden, where Aunt Woodleigh, escorted by Richard and Constance, was taking her customary walk.

"Do you know, Robert, that I have been studying you intently for the last few weeks," she said, with a smile.

"I hope the result has been satisfactory."

"Yes."

"May I ask the nature of your studies, Caroline ?"

"Candidly, I have been watching for a sign of your old love to Constance, having been doubtful if visits to Grove House were good for you," she replied. "I told your mother it would be a dangerous experiment."

"Ah ! was it her wish that I should come here and renew the past intimacy ?"

"It was."

"For what reason, Caroline ?"

"Perhaps she had confidence in our power to make you happy here ; hoped at a future time that you would prefer your aunt and cousins to your own way in a world of temptation. I told her there was temptation here, and you might become a prey to it—how glad I am to find that I was mistaken !"

"Love does not live without hope, Caroline."

"Yes, it does," she answered quickly. "There are some to whom hope never comes, and yet they love on, watch, and pray for the loved one. There are some—but I have a distaste for anything sentimental, now my own days of sentiment and romance are at end. Your love died when there was an end to the hopes that had fostered it, Robert, but then it was the love of a boy !"

"So everybody tells me," I said ; "but I was a strange boy, who thought deeply, too. May I ask what plan of action you would have adopted, had I shown signs that mine was an incurable passion."

"Treated you as the physicians treat the incurable in general," said Caroline, with a merry laugh.

"Given me notice to quit Grove House for ever, I suppose?"

"Something to that effect; but now the danger is over, you are Cousin Robert, again. I shall still keep a watch, though."

"Thank you."

"Watch you for many reasons; see that Richard—who is of a restless nature—does not wean you from Paddington and take you into the world again."

"You will hear remarks that only suggest doubt, but which you cannot keep from rankling in your mind;"—memorable words of Richard Woodleigh, which rose before me and startled me.

"Why should Richard seek to wean me from that place where, like a true son and brother, he finds his greatest pleasure?"

"Does he tell you that his greatest pleasure is in home?"

"His constant visits prove my assertion," said I; "surely, Caroline, you have no mistrust of your brother."

"You think I have?" she asked, with a heightened colour.

"That would not be sisterly."

"No," she answered; "and yet how many things happen in this world to set brothers and sisters apart. What a world of passion and plotting a large family embraces in itself."

"Not a family united like the Woodleighs."

"Perhaps not," said she; "have you seen Miss Bowden lately?"

"I have only seen her once since my return to England," I replied, surprised at the abrupt manner in which the subject was changed.

"Constance and I saw her a few days ago—she is greatly changed."

"For better or worse?"

"For better, certainly. She says that she is very happy with her father, and he, I believe, is content. There is a gentleness in her manner which is new, too—yes, there is a great improvement in Miss Bowden."

"And her reasons for leaving Grove House—may I ask them?"

"I do not know them," answered Caroline; "Miss Bowden exhibited all her old firmness when that subject was alluded

to. 'It is past, Miss Woodleigh,' was her answer ; 'spare me the pain of an allusion to that day. I did not leave without a struggle, or without sufficient cause—let that be my answer now—it will remain the same for ever.'

"You cannot guess the motive, Caroline?"

"Without a proof, it is not just to form suspicion," answered my cousin ; "I have had my doubts, but I have shut my ears against them. It is enough to have evil forced upon me, without seeking for it in the darkness."

"Evil!" I repeated ; "surely you do not think Miss Bowden——"

"Hush!" she interrupted ; "I do not attribute evil motives to Miss Bowden. More, I believe Miss Bowden acted for the best in her own judgment—acted in an eccentric manner, certainly, prompted by a nature not the most matter-of-fact in the world—but how we have been rambling in our talk this morning!—let us join them in the garden."

The following day, Caroline Woodleigh was taken ill. It was no light illness, for it kept her to her bed and deprived her of all strength. I have heard that men who work hard in the world, and daily overtax their powers, will give way as suddenly, and become very children in their weakness, and I thought that the illness of my Cousin Caroline was a malady akin to theirs.

For had she not overtaxed her strength for many months before and after her father's death, that strength of the mind which needs rest from its labour, and gives way beneath too heavy a burden? She was the one watcher of home, taking the place of her weak mother—she had care to struggle against, she had much on her mind. I knew, in due time, what cares, secrets and doubts had tortured her daily, despite her invariable self-possession, and I did not wonder then that her powers had failed her when the hour most needed them.

What a blank it was in the house when she was lying ill up stairs—how everybody missed her! Quiet, and perhaps a little methodical, her presence had not been greatly felt, but the void that was left in her absence struck home to them all. Aunt Woodleigh was lost without her eldest daughter ; she sat bewildered in her chair all day, and stared vacantly round her. Her children were loving, attentive, and anxious to supply every little want, but they did not *forestall* her in her wishes, did not seem to guess when she wanted them by her side, or

when she wished to be left alone to think. She was more nervous, irritable, and hard to please than ever.

Caroline was not a delicate girl, had had hardly a day's illness in her life, and the very singularity of her disease disturbed each member of the family. Upton came home from business cross and out of spirits, Constance had the cares of the household on her mind, and was distracted with keys and housekeeper's accounts, and Mary looked almost as helpless as her mother. Add to this their natural anxiety for their sister, and Grove House might be considered in confusion.

Richard Woodleigh and I called as regularly as ever. Richard was very anxious to know every day how Caroline was—almost as anxious as myself. That was a peculiar restless feeling of mine, that craving for news concerning Caroline—it was almost unaccountable. I thought it strange that I should miss her so much, be dull in Grove House, even with Constance Woodleigh there, feel so light of heart when the doctor told us she was better, so gloomy and misanthropical when the news came that she was worse. Was it to be accounted for by the knowledge that she had been my mother's confidant, and had been a daughter to that mother in the last days of her life?

Richard Woodleigh did his best to make up for Caroline's absence by an earnest attention to his sisters, by an attention still more earnest and affectionate to his mother; to put forth all the charms of his manner and the powers of his mind, to show what a dear, amiable fellow he was. If his aim were to secure their confidence, he completely succeeded; he was the eldest son, and in Caroline's absence his advice was of value.

It was not till the middle of November that Caroline Woodleigh ventured down stairs for the first time. She came into the room leaning on the arm of Constance, and walked feebly towards a chair that had been placed for her by the fireside. I hastened to congratulate her on her recovery, but she said, smiling faintly:—

“I am a long way from convalescence yet, Robert.”

“But so much better, my dear,” added her mother.

“It is a great step towards recovery to get back to the old room, is it not?” said Caroline.

“Yes, and the room looks the brighter, cousin,” I answered.

“I am selfish enough to hope that everybody has missed me,” she said; and then, looking at her brother, added, “well, Richard, have you no congratulations to offer me?”

"I am very glad to see you down stairs again, Caroline," answered her brother, thus appealed to.

"Thank you. To-day is the fifteenth of November, is it not?"

"Yes."

"You know what to-morrow is, Robert?" turning to me.

"My birthday—did *you* know that?"

"I have been thinking of it up stairs," she answered,—
"wondering if I should be well enough to wish you in person many happy returns of the day. You will be of age to-morrow."

"Yes," I said; "and my good friend, Mr. Markingham, intended to celebrate that event by a little fête at May Fair. We must postpone it till you are well enough to join us, Caroline."

"That may be a long time hence."

"I hope not."

"I hope not, too," she said; "for I shall be glad to be at my post again, taking care of mamma, and relieving Constance from the responsibilities of office."

"If Richard had not been so kind," said her mother, "I am sure I don't know what I should have done without you. He has been here almost every day with Robert. Are you cold, dear?"

"No, not very," replied Caroline, with a slight shiver; "I think the change has affected me a little—the room is very large. Go on, mamma, you were speaking of Richard."

"He has been very kind, I was saying, my dear," continued the mother, "in fact, has been so attentive to me that, if it had not been for Constance, I don't know how poor Robert would have been amused at times."

"There, there," said Richard, "Caroline don't want to be wearied with your song in *my* praise, mother; she is fatigued with the journey down stairs, and requires a little rest."

"Yes—a little rest," repeated Caroline, closing her eyes; "Richard is right. Let me keep quiet a few minutes; I want to think."

"Think, Carry!" cried Constance, "don't you know the doctor said that thinking too much had made you ill?"

"It is a hard task to sit still and keep all thought away."

"Then think of something pleasant—of the party that Robert is to give when you are well again, dear."

"That is a more pleasant thought for Constance Wood-

leigh," answered her sister; "her heart is light and full of hope."

"And what should make my sister Carry's heavy?" asked Constance, tenderly.

"Ah! what, indeed?" was the reply; "perhaps my heart will be lighter when my old strength comes back."

"That will soon be, now," cried Constance; "I am sure of that."

"And then for the grand ball at May Fair," said Dick; "which one of you will open with young one and twenty here? Who is it to be? Caroline, Constance, or Mary?"

"Not Caroline," said the invalid, smiling; "she must sit still, and not lose her strength all at once."

"Constance, then," said Dick, "of course it must be Constance. Make her promise at once, Robert."

"I don't mind promising that," said Constance, laughing, "if it will afford my cousin any pleasure."

"The greatest pleasure," I replied.

"What will Mr. Heberdeen say?" said Caroline.

Constance blushed, but replied with a bright smile:—

"Mr. Heberdeen's permission is not required; if it were, he would readily grant it, I am sure."

Caroline looked so steadily at the fire that Constance said:—

"There is a thinking fit coming on, Carry, and we must not allow it."

"I have not been used to company lately," answered Caroline; "you must leave me to myself, dear—my head aches!"

The next day, at the request of Aunt Woodleigh, my one and twentieth birthday was quietly celebrated at Grove House. Mr. Markingham was invited, and, after some reluctance, made his first appearance at Paddington, and Mr. Heberdeen and his sister came late in the evening.

Caroline Woodleigh did not venture into the midst of us that Thursday; her illness was too recent for the excitement of even a small party like our own, but I went up stairs during the evening to receive her congratulations. She was sitting in a daintily furnished room, which looked upon the garden, reading the novel that had been the subject of remark one night before her illness.

"Welcome to my study, Robert," she said, laying the book down; "I am sorry Doctor Martin interdicts me venturing

amongst you;—he cautions me against excitement. I may read, you see.”

“Has that book still its attractions?” I asked.

“Sometimes,” she answered; “have you read it?”

“No.”

“Will you read it and give me your opinion?”

“I am no judge of books, I fear.”

“Perhaps you will take it home with you, to oblige me,” she said; “there is some strange writing in it which strikes home—I shall be curious to know if it has the same effect on you. Call it my birthday present.”

I thought of the birthday present I had offered to Constance Woodleigh years ago, and reddened.

“I have to wish you many happy returns of the day, Robert,” said Caroline; “to wish that your progress from this important starting point may be all that you desire. Still——”

“Why do you pause, cousin?”

“Wishes are empty compliments,” she said, without replying to my question; “what resolutions have you formed?”

“Resolutions?”

“Should we leave youth behind and begin manhood without a settled purpose? You will not waste half your life in idleness?”

“What am I to do?”

“I would do something, were I in your place. I would not be wholly indebted to the stranger for my rise in life.”

“I have given up thinking about that,” I said, in a slightly peevish tone; “I made my choice years ago, and I cannot turn back now.”

“You can go forward!”

“I am not ambitious.”

“Are you content, cousin?”

“No,” I said, after some hesitation—“not content, perhaps—who is?”

“Then you have formed no resolutions?”

“No,” I replied; “I feel waiting for something that will give a turn to my life, and start me afresh, and until that time comes, I must proceed my old way.”

“Well, well, I am not strong enough to reason with you,” said Caroline; “you must be a strange young man to be contented with so purposeless a life, you who are not naturally idle.”

"I fear I am."

"No ; but bad habits have grown with you," she said, "and you will soon lose the power to shake them off. Bad habits and false friends, what wrong they may do you!—your mother feared them both."

"Poor mother!"

"I told her there was a noble nature which would assert itself in good time, and in that belief she left the world in peace!"

I did not answer, and she continued, earnestly:—

"You must not let that word, that promise be broken, Robert, or be ruled by other minds instead of thinking for yourself. You have your work to do in the world,—do not neglect the future, as you have idled away the past! At one and twenty, a man, looking back, should proudly say, "That task have I done," and, looking forward, should ask, "Now what work shall I do?"

I felt the reproof conveyed in her words, and still was silent. There was no reply to make ; I was an idler in the ranks of life, and men with more energy of will were marching past me daily, earning name, and fame, and riches.

Yet, name I cared not for, fame I was indifferent to, riches I had. I should not be alone in the world, there would be thousands to keep me company, Dick Woodleigh amongst the rest, and perhaps the best policy was to enjoy the present, and take no thought for the morrow!

"Bad habits and false friends"—"must not be ruled by other minds,"—was she thinking of her brother Richard, and making good his warning?

I thought so as I went down stairs, and yet, might not the warning be necessary in that mysterious future of which I took no heed?

That thought did not leave me when I was in the drawing-room again, and my friends and relations were around me—when Constance was congratulating me, and Richard Woodleigh, his handsome face all smiles, was wishing me prosperity—when Aunt Woodleigh was talking of my merits to Edmund Heberdeen, whom she had button-holed for the evening, and who was listening with a sickly smile—when Upton was shaking me by the hand, and the hand of the friend, philosopher and patron was resting on my shoulder!

I thought of my warning ; if I could have thought of the hour not far distant, and been warned of *that* too by a gentle

voice, from what sorrow I might have saved my friends, and from what treachery myself !

The evening passed over quietly ; there was no sign of the beginning of the end in the far distance, although silently over the wine, in the pauses of the song, in the echo of the voice that wished me health, wealth, and long life, the web was slowly being spun !

END OF THE SEVENTH BOOK.

BOOK VIII.

A HARD FIGHT.

“ Shall I hopeless, then, pursue
A fair shadow that still flies me?
Shall I still adore and woo
A proud heart that does despise me? ”

SHERBURNE.

“ My hostesse asked me how I liked this tale? I said it was long enough
and good enough to passe time that might be worser spent.”

*“ Robin Goodfellow, his Mad Prankes
and Merry Jests.”*

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF TOWN

"ROBERT, old fellow," exclaimed Richard Woodleigh, bursting unceremoniously into my dressing-room, a week after I had attained my years of discretion, "it's no good going to Grove House this evening; they're off."

"Off!—where?"

"To Brighton. They started by the afternoon train, and have taken Miss Heberdeen with them. Caroline was progressing so slowly at Paddington that Dr. Martin would not hear of her remaining in town, and ordered her at once to the Sussex coast. Upton brought me the news as he was going to business; have you received a letter from him?"

"No."

"He said that he had written to inform you of the fact, and to ask if you felt inclined to run down to Brighton with him on Saturday week?"

"With pleasure," I answered.

"Why should we leave it till Saturday week, Robert?" said Richard Woodleigh; "we, who have no business on our hands, no rascally contracts to disturb our minds and make us old before our time. Brighton is the very place for us; all the life which keeps London from stagnating has gone to that fashionable watering-place—shall we follow it?"

I hesitated.

"Perhaps they will not thank us for our company, Dick."

"Those *I* care for will be glad to see me," said Richard Woodleigh; "and I am sure my amiable cousin will be as welcome as spring flowers, or money at quarter-day. Upton is not at Brighton, Heberdeen cannot join them yet awhile, and I hate to see ladies of my acquaintance strolling unprotected about the streets. So we'll go down and take care of them."

He had hardly ended his assertion when the servant brought in Upton's letter.

"Read what he says," said Dick, "or as you are so busy with that neck-tie, I'll read it for you. Shall I?"

"If you please."

Richard Woodleigh opened the letter and read aloud the contents, which were similar in purport to the news that I had already received. He read it, however, in so absent a manner, and with so hoarse a voice, that I left off the arrangement of my tie and stared at him.

"Is there anything else?"

"Nothing," answered Dick; "what else should there be?—read for yourself."

He tossed the letter towards me, and, after a cursory glance, I said:—

"I was afraid there was some bad news which you wished to keep from me."

"Whatever put that in your head, Robert?"

"Fancy, I suppose. Upton writes a queer hand, does he not?"

"I wonder I managed to read such an epistle at all," said Dick; "it's as ugly as an Egyptian scroll, and twice as illegible. He writes worse than ever, and it is my belief he is always in such a hurry that he writes two letters at once—this is the left-handed one."

I laughed as Dick Woodleigh took up the letter again and flapped it carelessly in his hand.

"Well, you will not leave me to go down alone, Robert?"

"Not if you are determined to start at once," was my reply.

"I am surprised that Upton did not wish us to join the ladies immediately, and keep them from becoming low-spirited. I wonder if Heberdeen asked Upton to write this letter to you—or dictated it!"

"Heberdeen dictate my cousin's letters to me, Richard?" said I. "Nonsense!"

"Oh! not such nonsense, Robert, but a piece of prudence, warrantable in a lover who fears losing his mistress."

"He don't fear that, Richard."

My companion laughed and said:—

"I know better."

"Then he is undeserving of Constance Woodleigh," said I, warmly.

"Heberdeen is a man who would be jealous without the shadow of a cause, I am afraid."

"Heberdeen has certainly no cause to be jealous," I said; "I gave up the chase three years ago. I had my answer then from her own lips."

"With Caroline by!"

"How did you know that?"

"No matter. I have heard the story," replied Richard; "and as I have told you before, Caroline 'is a most rare Jesuit.'"

"I don't believe it, Dick."

"You need not," said Richard, his eyebrows lowering; "it matters not to me if you consider her an angel. You had your answer, were easily satisfied, and went your way. Still, you have returned to her side again, she has grown strange in her manner to Heberdeen, they quarrel sometimes, you flirt with her, he is more proud, she is more distant; there is a line between them which will widen to a gulf."

"I hope not."

"Ah! because the boy's fancy has died out, and you are blind to the beauty that dazzled your youth. Had your heart really been touched you would have said to me, 'Dick Woodleigh, you are my friend and *her* brother; is there hope for me now?'"

"Had I asked that question?" said I, eagerly.

"I should have answered, 'Watch for yourself, and draw your conclusions.' When two lovers quarrel about you, and the lady takes your part, and says you are all that is honourable and good, it looks suspicious—that is all!"

"When did Constance take my part?"

"The day you came of age, Heberdeen and she quarrelled. He objected to Constance offering you her warm congratulations, and made some sweeping remarks which roused the blood of the Woodleighs."

"I am very sorry that I was the cause of words between them. It shall not occur again."

"So Heberdeen says."

"What!"

"No matter, he is my friend too, and I cannot betray his confidence, though I may pity his folly—I have done. Come to Brighton, and please me, or stay at home and acquiesce in Ned Heberdeen's commands—I will not press you further."

"I'll go to Brighton."

"When? Saturday week?"

"To-night, if it will suit your arrangements."

"To-night is the very time; you can answer Upton when you are in Brighton, and surprise him. If Heberdeen has had a hand in this little note, how he will swear at the result!"

We went to the drawing-room to apprise Mr. Markingham of our intentions, and found that gentleman reading by the fire

and smoking a gold-mounted meerschaum which had never formed part of his Barker Street property.

"Brighton!" remarked Mr. Markingham, closing his book; "you have soon made up your mind, Robert."

"Why, as Richard starts to-night by the express train, Sir, I thought that I would accompany him."

"Well, there is nothing to detain you here," said Markingham, quietly; "and you will find Brighton gayer than May Fair."

"We hope to have the pleasure of seeing you in Sussex, Mr. Markingham," said Dick; "the distance is not great."

"Nor the inducement small," added Mr. Markingham; "I'll consider it."

After a pause, he said:—

"Robert, I have just finished this book; will you take it? It may amuse you on your journey."

"What book is it, Sir?"

"'Behind the Mask,'" said Mr. Markingham; "the work of one who has seen life, and evidently suffered in its progress. A hard, bitter volume, the dark colours laid on too lavishly, the light ones with too faint a hand. Have *you* read it, Mr. Woodleigh?"

"No, Sir," answered Dick.

"It is worth perusal."

Mr. Markingham's criticism reminding me of Caroline's interest in the novel, I took the book with me to Brighton, even began the perusal of it in the railway carriage—much to Dick's annoyance, who desired a little discourse on money matters before we reached our journey's end. That discourse was destined to be postponed till the following morning, for the book had been opened, and I was under its spell. It was a book that startled me in the first chapter, for the hero was not a faultless being, as heroes are in novels, but an irritable, discontented ne'er-do-weel, like myself. The evident aim of the book was to demonstrate the sin of discontent, the evils to which it gives rise, and the power it has to make the heart a wilderness. Every page was a reproof to me, and I, who would not have listened to fifty words of objurgation from a friend or stepfather, read on with interest. A few brief lines here and there appealed so forcibly to me, laid bare with the touch of genius so much that I had felt and thought, that I could scarcely believe a stranger's hand had penned them.

"Was Caroline Woodleigh the author?" I thought; "or

Mr. Markingham?" They had been anxious that I should read the book; they were both deep thinkers, knew me well, and had studied my character. Still pondering over the book, and wondering if chance or design, real life or imagination, had produced a character akin to mine, when the train reached the Brighton terminus, and woke me up from reverie.

"Come, Robert, shut up that infernal book—pitch it out of the window. How you can be interested in such nonsense, I cannot conceive!"

"And why you persist in condemning it without a fair reading, Richard, is equally a mystery."

"I have read enough to judge," said Dick, curtly, as we left the carriage and mixed with the busy crowd of travellers, and those to whom the travellers were dear. One of the latter, a lady of slight figure, dressed in mourning, who had been waiting the train's arrival, passed us, and looked into the carriage we had quitted, and then, anxiously, into the next compartment.

"Wait one moment," said Woodleigh, as the lady flitted from carriage to carriage of the train, turning occasionally to observe the stream of people flowing by her.

"Miss Bowden, as I live!" was my exclamation of surprise.

"Yes, Miss Bowden. Now, Robert, for once in my life I am going to ask a favour."

It was not for once in his life, but the remark, being a hurried one, was not sufficiently considered.

"What is it?"

"That you will proceed straight to our hotel and wait my coming there. I may be five minutes, perhaps ten; not longer."

"But——"

"But it is necessary, or I would not entreat you," urged Dick; "I have not seen Miss Bowden since she left my mother's house, and it is important that I should speak to her."

"Very well," said I—"which hotel is it to be?"

Richard gave me the necessary information, and then left me to pursue my way alone. It was not for long, however, for I had scarcely set foot in the street when a hand glided on my arm, and an agitated voice said:—

"Don't stop, Robert Woodleigh, to ask questions; take the first turning to the right, and walk faster—I shall soon recover myself, I have been running!"

Miss Bowden—for it was she—walked hurriedly by my side, breathing with difficulty. When we were in the street to which she had directed me, she looked round and said, with a deep sigh of relief:—

“He has missed me.”

“Do you mean Richard Woodleigh?”

“Yes,” she replied; “I saw you both together at the station, where I was waiting for my father. I saw him leave you, and I guessed his object and eluded him. If he follow, I rely on your protection.”

“Surely Miss Bowden does not fear any incivility from my friend?”

“Ah! he is your friend now,” she said, coldly—“he is all that is well-bred and clever, is he not?”

“I have no fault to find with him.”

“What does he want in Brighton?” she asked, peremptorily; “does he follow me here, or know me so little, even *now*,” stamping her foot passionately on the pavement, “as to think I will put up with it? I have borne much for his sake and my own; have kept my peace and let others be deluded, but he must not rely too much upon my woman’s pride—tell him so!”

I promised the faithful delivery of her message.

“No, no,” she corrected hastily; “tell him nothing. I beg that you will not inform him of this meeting.”

“It shall be a secret, if you desire it, Miss Bowden.”

“Thank you,” she answered more gently; “and now, what brings him here?”

I told her of the illness of Caroline and the reasons for our visit to Brighton.

She walked thoughtfully by my side for several moments, and then said:—

“Is Miss Heberdeen in Brighton?”

“Yes,” I replied; “she accompanied my aunt and cousins this morning.”

“Then she is still engaged to Mr. Richard Woodleigh?”

As I again replied in the affirmative, I felt the hand upon my arm tremble very much.

“Am I acting for the best?” she muttered. “God knows—I don’t.”

She withdrew her hand from my arm.

“I must leave you here.”

“But you will be alone?”

"I am near home," she replied; "still I thank you for your solicitude. Do you intend to stay long in Brighton?"

"A few weeks."

"We may meet again then. My father will join me to-morrow, and when I have him for a protector I shall not be very nervous."

"How times have altered, Miss Bowden!"

"You mean how I have altered," she said; "well, it is true enough. I never thought to be at *his* side again, but when I heard that he was alone in the world, my hard heart softened. I am happy with him, Mr. Woodleigh."

"How glad I am to hear it!"

"I have not shown many symptoms of happiness this evening," she said; "but then I have been disturbed by the past rising before me when I least expected it—the guilty, foolish past! Good-night."

Before I could respond to her abrupt adieu, she was hastening away, and feeling that any attempt to conduct her safely to her home would not be favourably received, I turned my steps in the direction of the hotel in the King's Road, where I found Richard Woodleigh awaiting my arrival.

"Why, where the devil have you been?" he asked savagely, as I entered.

"I must have lost my way, I think," I replied; "have you been waiting long?"

"Half an hour."

"Well, and how is Miss Bowden?" I asked, anxious to forestall any questions that might be put to me.

"I haven't seen her," he answered; "she vanished like a ghost. Hanged if I don't think she crossed the line and risked getting smashed!"

"Was there anything to fear, then?"

"No," said Dick Woodleigh, biting his lips; "who said there was? I—but I'm tired and out of temper—you must excuse me, Robert; I shall go straight to my room."

Dick Woodleigh suited the action to the word, and after ten minutes' brown study, I drew my chair to the table and opened the book which had not quitted my hand since my departure from London.

I was soon absorbed in its contents again—there was fresh subject for surprise as the story went on, for there was a second character that reminded me forcibly of the gentleman who had recently bidden me good-night. But he was the

villain of the story, and that could not be Dick Woodleigh ! Yet there were, at times, his very words and turns of speech expressed on the page before me, and once it seemed so like Dick Woodleigh's style of reasoning that I put the volume down and went off into a brown study again.

I finished the book that night ; I was glad to have done with it. It left an unpleasant impression upon me, which it took days to shake off. It made me almost distrustful of my best friend, Dick Woodleigh, of whom I had been warned, and to whom I had lately given all my affection and—lent all my money !



CHAPTER II.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

THE week which followed my arrival in Brighton was a week of trial and temptation—a week in which the few resolutions I had made—remembering Caroline's exhortation on my birthday—began to melt away, and to be replaced by a visionary's dreams. A week in which there was little to consider or to study, save my Cousin Constance. There was no one to warn or watch me ; Caroline was not strong enough to leave her room, Upton and Heberdeen were in London, and the rest, not even Constance, had no suspicions of the struggle that was taking place within me.

Was it by accident or design that in our walks Constance Woodleigh was always my companion ? that her hand rested on my arm, and there was no one by to hear a word of our conversation ?—simple and commonplace conversation enough, about Caroline, her mother, or the scenes around us, and yet dangerous to me ! So dangerous, despite the knowledge that another claimed her, and she was to marry him next year ; despite strange moments of indifference in myself—moments which soon died away though,—when all her beauty, smiles, and confidence failed to stir my heart. Yes, she was constantly my companion ; in our walks Dick escorted his mother and Miss Heberdeen, and left Constance to my care ; when the mother was too weak, or disinclined to leave the house, Dick preferred the company of Mary and Miss Heberdeen to a

tête-à-tête with the object of his affections, and when we rode out on horseback something always occurred which brought me to Constance Woodleigh's side and kept me there !

And Constance, knowing her own heart, and having faith in me, never for one instant thought of love reviving in my breast, and treated me with all a sister's confidence. And thus a week went by, temptation growing stronger every day, strange words and hints of Richard Woodleigh keeping her foremost in my thoughts, adding fuel to the fire, fostering wild hopes, and weakening all my moral courage and honourable principle. There was nothing to distract my mind—there were no friends but the Woodleighs to mix with, Miss Bowden had disappeared as mysteriously as she had crossed my path, and Caroline, the only one who might at that time have turned me by a word, was not well enough to take the part of watcher. A watcher came at last, however, suddenly and fiercely in the midst of us. On a Friday—unlucky day for lovers as for travellers ! — Edmund Heberdeen made his appearance.

We were strolling on the Chain Pier, Dick with Miss Heberdeen and his sister Mary, and I with Constance Woodleigh, when he marched towards us, looking very erect and dignified.

"What, Ned !" cried Richard, shaking him heartily by the hand ; "this is a pleasant surprise. How are you ?"

"Quite well," he said, laconically.

"Have you any news for us, Edmund ?" asked Miss Heberdeen nervously, for since her father's death she was easily alarmed.

"Not any, Harriet. I am here two days earlier than I anticipated ; is that anything very extraordinary ?"

"But your office, Edmund ?"

"I can obtain leave of absence and get my 'day out' like any other servant, Miss Heberdeen," he said, bitterly.

"And very glad we are to see you," said Dick Woodleigh ; "there are some more friends of yours behind, but they walk slowly, and we are always losing sight of them—oh ! here they are ; I did not know they were so near !"

"Neither did Mr. Heberdeen," said Constance, her face radiant with smiles, "for he has not deigned to bestow one glance upon us."

"I was afraid I might disturb you and——" glaring at me with wild beast ferocity, "*your cousin!*"

"Oh! we have not been plotting treason, Edmund," said Constance, with a musical laugh, which was checked suddenly, as not a muscle of his face relaxed; "but how grave you are! Is anything wrong at home?"

"Nothing is wrong *at home*, Miss Woodleigh, or abroad—that is, of any consequence. May I ask how Miss Caroline is?"

"Much better; but——"

"Your brother Upton desired to be affectionately remembered; he will be down by the eight o'clock train to-morrow night."

"Edmund," said Miss Heberdeen, in a tone not intended for my ears, "you have forgotten Mr. Robert Woodleigh, I think."

"Forgotten Mr. Robert Woodleigh!" exclaimed young Heberdeen, unnecessarily loud, "I ask ten thousand pardons of that gentleman for omitting the reverence due to him. I hope I see you well, Sir?"

"Quite well, Mr. Heberdeen, thank you."

"The sea air appears to have done you a great deal of good, Sir!" continued he. "You were looking pale when I saw you last at Grove House. Over study, perhaps?"

"No," was my brief response.

My blood was tingling in an unpleasant manner, and my face reddening with the attempt to repress any exhibition of anger before him or my cousins. He saw me flush, and was more ironical in consequence.

"I hope you intend to make a long stay in Brighton, Mr. Woodleigh," said he, "if only for these ladies' sakes. Your time being at your own disposal, gives you the advantage over us poor clerks, Sir."

"I shall not hurry back to London, Mr. Heberdeen, and the ladies shall receive every attention."

"I do not doubt it."

"Shall we retrace our steps homeward?" suggested Miss Heberdeen, quickly perceiving the current of ill-feeling beneath our false politeness. "Mrs. Woodleigh and Caroline will think we are neglecting them."

"Pray let us return at once, then," said Heberdeen, offering his arm to Mary Woodleigh, who, rather surprised at his attention, blushed as she accepted it. We walked back in pairs

towards my aunt's apartments at the "Warwick," the last couple—Constance Woodleigh and her cousin—rather meditative.

I made one or two efforts to sustain the conversation which the arrival of Heberdeen had broken off, but Constance replied in monosyllables, or answered so irrelevantly that it needed little observation to detect that the subject was foreign to her thoughts. Richard Woodleigh and I did not dine that day at the "Warwick Mansion," but returned to our own hotel, promising to spend the evening with our friends.

"I did not accept their invitation to dine," said Dick, "because you and Heberdeen are not the best of friends, and the less you see of each other the better. What a jealous fellow he is!"

"There was very little to make him jealous this morning, Dick."

"That does not matter much, when he is in one of his extravagant moods," said Richard; "poor Constance! I suppose she'll come in for the lion's share of his ill-humour this afternoon. If he ever marry her, he'll worry her into an early grave."

Dinner was concluded, and we were smoking our cigars over our wine, and still talking of Edmund Heberdeen, when that gentleman's card was brought to Dick. There were a few words written in pencil underneath the name, and my cousin read them attentively, biting his lip meanwhile.

"Tell Mr. Heberdeen that I will be down directly."

"He will not come up, Robert," said Dick, after the servant had withdrawn, "though he wishes to see me particularly. Will you excuse me for half an hour?"

"Certainly," I answered; "pray don't mind me."

"But I do mind you," said Dick, with some warmth, "and I have a very strong objection to this kind of behaviour," flinging the card into the fire; "it's not treating my friend like a gentleman! We are here in Brighton together, and if he wants to see me, he should not say, '*without your friend*,' and underline it as though you were highly objectionable. Confound and curse his pride—there's no better blood in his veins than in ours!"

"He may have something important to communicate, Richard, and I am not anxious for his society."

"Well, I shall not be long."

Dick Woodleigh departed, and I stayed at home, smoking my cigar and thinking of Ned Heberdeen's faults. I went to sleep over Ned Heberdeen's faults, too, and dreamt that gentleman and I were wrestling at the end of the pier, and endeavouring to pitch each other into a rough and uncomfortable-looking sea beneath, and I was still engaged in the contest, and had nearly got him head downwards over the side, when Dick's return woke me up in the moment of victory. It was nearly dark, and I must have been asleep two hours.

"How late you are, Dick."

"Yes," replied he; "I have had to listen to no end of raving. Talk about passion, I never saw a man in a greater rage in my life."

"What has occasioned it?"

"Oh! the old story. He says your attentions are too marked to his betrothed, and that he comes to me, a mutual friend to ask—*demand* I think he said—the reason. He also expresses a wish for your absence this evening at the 'Warwick.'"

"Does he require an answer?"

"Not in person. He declines respectfully, but firmly, an interview with Robert Woodleigh under any pretence."

"Did he send that contemptuous message to me?" I cried.

"I have quoted his words as correctly as my memory will allow," answered Dick; "but you must consider his excitement—he hardly knows what he is doing."

"He knows well enough what will insult me," I said fiercely, "and I will afford him no explanation—tell him that he has no right to ask it."

"Why not tell him——"

"Neither is my answer to be dictated by Richard Woodleigh," I shouted, interrupting him. "I have replied to Mr. Heberdeen, and have nothing more to say."

Cousin Dick, unprepared for my resistance to his suggestion, was taken aback by my vehemence. He moved towards the door.

"Well, I will tell him."

"Is he below, then?"

"Yes," said Dick, hesitating.

"Is he afraid to see me?" I cried; "afraid to ask me those insulting questions which he scruples not to send by you?"

I made a rush towards the door, but Dick Woodleigh had closed it and set his back against it.

"Let me pass, Richard," I said ; "I will see that man !"

"Just consider for a moment what harm it may do," entreated Dick ; "my dear fellow, remember that he is a friend of the family !"

"So am I !"

"Yes, yes ; but he is in no condition to meet you at present, and your impetuosity will not allay his excitement," said Dick ; "as the friend of both, Bob, I cannot let you pass."

"Very well, perhaps high words will do more harm than good," replied I, returning to my seat ; "take him his answer. I will not follow you."

I did not follow him, but the departure of Dick Woodleigh was the signal for me to leave the room, and descend by another staircase into the street. I had no intention of meeting Heberdeen then ; I was only anxious to reach the "Warwick" before him, and take my place, if possible, by the side of his betrothed.

"He express a wish for my absence from the 'Warwick !'" I muttered, as I strode on at a rapid pace ; "*demand* a reason for my marked attentions, and decline under any pretence an interview with *me*—I will show him what I care for his wishes and demands !"

All those antipathies that I had had towards him in my boyhood, that had grown with me and but known a diminution with his loss of fortune, were revived again with tenfold force. I could see no virtues in him then ; he was all that was proud and vindictive—he was not worthy to be Constance Woodleigh's husband ; he would make her life a misery !

When I was ushered into the apartments of the Woodleighs, I found Cousin Constance and my aunt the only occupants of the drawing-room. Constance looked up with surprise as I entered, and my aunt exclaimed :—

"Oh ! good gracious, Robert, has Richard met with an accident ?"

"Not that I am aware of, aunt," I replied.

"You came in with so grave a face that I was afraid something serious had happened."

"Nothing has happened more serious to your son than a meeting with Mr. Edmund Heberdeen," I said. "How is Caroline this evening ?"

"Much better, thank you," replied my aunt; "she talks of turning over a new leaf to-morrow, and going out in search of the sea breeze. Oh, dear! we Woodleighs are a very long time getting over our complaints!"

Whilst my aunt was talking, I kept my eyes on Constance. There were no signs of any recent agitation in her demeanour; she was calm, self-possessed, perhaps a little thoughtful. If there had been a storm, it was one of those storms of Venus which an old poet asserts to be "tempered with rose-water," for, five minutes after my arrival, I heard her singing softly to herself.

"I hope Caroline will not be induced to join us to-night; she came down too soon at Paddington, and had a relapse in consequence."

"I think I'll go and see where she and the girls are," said she, rising from her chair. "Robert, my dear, will you lend me the assistance of your arm to the door of the next room? Thank you. Don't move, Constance; Robert will be back in a minute, and you had better find something to amuse him till tea is ready. Dear me," she said, peevishly, "I think it is quite time we had tea!"

"Shall I ring, mamma?"

"Certainly not, dear. Mr. Heberdeen and Richard have not returned yet—what a time they are, to be sure!"

I saw Aunt Woodleigh to the door of Caroline's boudoir, and then hastened back to the drawing-room. Constance was sitting at the table, listlessly turning over the leaves of an album.

"Well, Constance, in what manner are you going to fulfil your mother's injunctions?"

"To amuse you?" she asked with a smile; "surely you are big enough to amuse yourself. Here are a great many books; here's the *Illustrated London News* and a chess problem to solve—here's the almanack for the coming year."

"I hate almanacks, and I don't much care about chess problems," was my reply.

"You must make your choice," said Constance, "for I am very busy."

She feigned an intense interest in the album, and I sat biting my nails and regarding her. Was it at Heberdeen's command that she hung aloof from me, or was she fearful of offending her lover?

I took up the *Illustrated News*, sat down at the chess-table and arranged the pieces as in the diagram before me.

Five minutes passed.

I was thinking little of chess strategy, and a great deal of Edmund Heberdeen, whom I had resolved to mortify that night, if possible, when Constance's voice aroused me.

"Have you solved it, Robert?"

"No."

"I must be improving in my chess play, for I mastered it this afternoon, with some assistance from Mr. Heberdeen."

This statement puzzled me.

There had been no quarrel between the lovers, then, or there had been explanations and reconciliation. And yet something *had* happened to disturb Mr. Heberdeen's feelings, or he was an excellent hand at bottling them up before company.

"I must give the problem up. Will you show me the solution, Constance?"

She seemed to hesitate again.

"Are you determined to resign so easily?"

"Yes, it is wasting my time and disturbing my temper."

Constance left her album, and came and stood by the chess-table whilst I rearranged the pieces in the requisite position.

"I fear that I have forgotten the clue to the mystery myself," said Constance, bending over the table, with an expression of doubt on her pretty face; "let me see, I think the pawn moves to the king's fifth."

"Shall I play the black men?"

"Yes."

Constance drew a chair to the chess-table and sat down facing me, one little white hand hovering over the pieces, the other beating a rather impatient tattoo whilst she waited for my move.

There was evil at my heart, where the revengeful feelings had gathered together, whispering "If he could come in now, he who despised you,—who treated you, in his foolish jealousy, as a menial beneath him, and sent you his orders by a go-between!"

The door opened, and a voice announced:—

"Mr. Heberdeen!"

I did not look up—after what had passed, it was not my place to acknowledge the presence of him I felt I hated.

It was enough for me to know that he was there, that the frown was deepening and the dark eyes gathering fire. It was a triumph to me!

"What a time you have been away, Edmund."

Edmund walked towards the fire, leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece, rested his head upon his hand, and after staring at the blazing coals some moments, answered absently:—

"Yes—a long time—too long!"

"Mr. Woodleigh has been trying to solve this problem."

"Has he?"

"Yes, but he has been unsuccessful, and requires assistance. Do you remember the second move, Edmund?"

Heberdeen did not deign a reply until the question was repeated, when he gave a quick stamp with his foot and cried "No" in the most decisive manner.

Constance looked towards her lover, but he kept his gaze directed to the fire, and would not meet her glance. Sullen and disdainful, he stood there in his old position—the picture of a jealous swain.

"If Mr. Heberdeen will not condescend to enlighten us," said Constance, with a quivering lip, "we must solve the riddle for ourselves, Robert. I think the knight discovers check."

"Then there is a chance of escape for the king, Constance—*the bird is not yet mated!*"

There was a terrible noise amongst the fire-irons, as if Mr. Heberdeen had leaped over the fender into the midst of them, but I did not raise my eyes for an instant from the chess-board. It was a strange attempt to solve a mystery of Caissa with thoughts far away from the subject; it was very strange to find, after five moves had been made on each side, that the black king had escaped from the snare, and the white forces were all in confusion.

"I cannot recollect it," said Constance, with a forced laugh; "I think we had better postpone it till to-morrow."

"The morrow never comes, Constance," was my answer.

"My memory is a bad one—I am in no mood for chess—my head aches."

"Well, one more attempt, and I release my fair prisoner," I said; "there," quickly rearranging the pieces in their former position—"play the white men again, Constance, just to oblige an old obstinate cousin, who don't like to give up anything he has once undertaken,"

Mr. Heberdeen abandoned his meditative posture, and came with a savage hop, skip, and jump to the side of Constance.

"I will show Mr. Woodleigh the position, Constance," he said, sternly.

"But——" began Constance, in a hesitant manner, as she rose from her seat.

"I will return you the gentleman in one moment, if you desire it, Miss Woodleigh," he said quickly; "but it is a pity to keep him longer in the dark."

"I am obliged to Mr. Heberdeen for his pity," I answered; "although perhaps a more deserving object of it might have been discovered."

"Will you allow me to enlighten him, Miss Woodleigh, or shall I withdraw until this pleasant game is ended?"

"Why withdraw, Sir?" asked Constance, raising her head proudly.

"That old aphorism concerning the disagreeable number three—Miss Woodleigh perhaps remembers it?"

"I remember too much, Sir," answered Constance haughtily, as she passed him, "and Mr. Heberdeen will remember this day also."

Heberdeen kept his eyes fixed on the receding figure of his affianced wife till the door closed and shut it from his sight—then he turned to me.

"Now, Sir," he said, in a voice that was very husky, "this problem!"

There was a rapid movement of his hand across the chess-table, and then kings, queens, bishops, and pawns were swept off the board and dashed in one general ruin to the ground.

"A clever move, Mr. Heberdeen," I remarked.

"Not the only clever move that has been made this day, Sir," said Heberdeen, his black eyes flashing with the passion which clenched his hands and made his chest heave, "or the only move to be accounted for."

"Accounted for—to whom?"

"To me, Sir,—to *me*," cried Heberdeen.

"I sent an answer to you by Mr. Richard Woodleigh; I said then that you had no right to ask an explanation—I repeat it!"

"I had a right then—I have a greater now. The suspicions belong to the past, and the present has confirmed them."

"Then there is nothing to be accounted for!"

"I think there is."

"Not to you," I retorted, "lest you should think I fear your anger, or am moved by your majestic manner. I have *my* pride, Mr. Heberdeen."

"The pride of an upstart who has fattened on my family's ruin," exclaimed Heberdeen; "the pride which humbles itself before riches for the sake of a share in them; the pride that sits idle or works mischief—nothing nobler than that!"

"Mr. Heberdeen did not always think so lightly of riches."

"I have learned my lesson since—yours is to come. My fall was sudden; I may rise again as suddenly. But this is not the point, Sir," cried he, "not the scheme which I intend to foil, or lose my faith in woman's truth and purity."

He marched once up and down the room, and then took his stand before me again not much improved by the perambulation.

"Are you aware, Mr. Woodleigh, that your Cousin Constance is engaged to me?"

"I am."

"Engaged to be my wife in a few months?"

"I have also been informed of that, Sir."

"Then, Sir, you are a coward! You play a coward's part and stab behind my back, taking advantage of my absence, and caring not for her feelings or my own—I say it shall not be!"

"Why did you not tell me this some hours ago?—*demand* your explanations then?"

A look of surprise mingled with his anger as he answered bitterly:—

"Because you were afraid to hear me."

"The manner of hearing was not certainly convenient."

"No matter the manner, Mr. Woodleigh—time is precious, and I have something further to communicate."

"The briefer, Sir, the better."

"I presume it is your intention to follow up the chase, to seek, as the expression runs, to 'cut me out?'"

"I shall not answer those questions."

"You *dare* not own your love for her."

It was my turn to give way, and, half mad with passion, I raved out:—

"I love her, *THERE!* I loved her years ago,—before your

eyes had seen her, or you had thought of winning a heart too good, and too gentle for your comprehension. I will love her to the last!"

Heberdeen had to struggle with his own utterance before he could reply.

"Then Constance Woodleigh must decide between us. The avowal has been wrung from you—the avowal which I wished—and you or I must leave her side for ever. I will not have you near her, eager for her smiles, walking by her side, winning her, in moments of weakness, to make promises to *dance* with you! I will end your love-dream, or my own, at once. I will end it now!"

He dashed his hand upon the table from which he had swept the chess-men, and split the veneer in half-a-dozen places; he glared into my face with eyes full of hate and rage.

"She shall tell you to go with her own lips—it is her place, now you have acknowledged your passion."

"She will not confirm your decree of banishment—I am sure of it."

"She must consider my happiness, or she is not worthy to be my wife. A true woman will make any sacrifice."

"If it be asked in a true spirit!"

"I will ask it as my right; it is for her sake as well as mine. She shall tell you to begone—she shall——"

The door opened, and Richard Woodleigh entered.

"Hallo, Bob, you *are* here, then? That was an artful trick of yours, to steal a march on me," said he; "why didn't you say you were in a hurry to get to the 'Warwick'? Is anything the matter?" looking hard at me.

"Ask Mr. Heberdeen."

"Yes, Dick, something very serious," said Heberdeen; "I have brought your friend to an explanation at last, and it is as I feared. You could not have come at a more opportune moment, for I have a favour to ask. I wish you to tell Constance that I am anxious to see her for a few moments *alone*."

"Now, Ned, you are in one of your hot fits—leave it till the morning."

"I will not leave it for one instant," cried Heberdeen.

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, then, I must obey you. I suppose," hesitating a moment, "I cannot adjust this difference between you two Hotspurs?"

"Mr. Heberdeen and I are not anxious to shake hands, Richard," I said.

"Will you tell Constance of my request, or will you not?" asked Heberdeen, sharply.

"I'll tell her," said Dick.

"I presume," turning to me, "that I am not compelled to have you for a witness. I said *alone*."

"I will oblige you by withdrawing."

I left the drawing-room, took my hat from the hall, and walked into the King's Road. I had not proceeded far before Richard Woodleigh overtook me.

"This is a queer business, Robert," said he. "Heberdeen's mad humour has lasted longer than I expected. What does he want to ask Constance?"

I told him.

"He is in too great a passion to explain a thing calmly, and Constance is already offended—there will be a storm at the 'Warwick.'"

"It will not last long."

"Long enough for Heberdeen to make a fool of himself, or I'm no judge of human nature. Bob Woodleigh, he's playing your game, but you don't look pleased at it."

"No."

"All may be settled by this time; Heberdeen may have said a word, *will* say a word that will drop the curtain over his happiness and leave the road open for yours. By Jove, it is soon over—here he is!"

Edmund Heberdeen, looking very wild, the frown deeper than ever, the face ghastly in its whiteness, came rapidly towards us.

"Well, Ned, I hope it is all settled amicably."

"It is settled!"

"What do you mean?" asked Dick.

"Is it so difficult to understand? This *gentleman*," indicating me with a wave of his hand, "and I have been playing a match, and he has won the game! I congratulate him."

He raised his hat with mock politeness, but I did not imitate his example. There was something so despairing even in his irony, that the sting of it fell harmless.

"Dick, I shall see you at my own house when my sister comes back to London. Good-bye."

"Good-bye—where are you going?"

"I leave Brighton to-night."

"Nonsense. You have been too hasty—you will forget all this in an hour or two."

"Not in a lifetime!"

"Come back with me to Constance, and——"

He broke away from his friend's hand, that had rested for a moment on his arm, crying:—

"Never, Dick! Never again!" and then darted away into the dark night, and left us looking at each other.

"Am I a true prophet, Robert?" said Dick, at last.

"It appears like it."

"It is all for the best; they were not fit for each other, were they?"

"I don't know," I said, peevishly; "I'm sorry that I have been the cause of making him or Constance miserable. It was a fool's trick of mine, and can do no one any good."

"That remains to be seen!"

We did not return to the "Warwick" that evening; we spent the evening at our hotel, drank a great deal of wine, and smoked a large number of cigars. My mind was troubled at first; sorrow and remorse were at my heart, and sat heavy on my conscience. But I drank my wine, and listened to Dick Woodleigh till there was a fire and lightness within me that put to flight all the shadows. Hope sat at my right hand—that hand which grew so unsteady after the third bottle!—and the world before me looked, through my blood-shot eyes, quite happy and frolicsome. For Dick talked of Constance, and in that world before me, or in that flashing meteor which seemed my world that night, she was the brightest vision!

CHAPTER III.

STILL DREAMING.

THE following day Caroline Woodleigh kept her promise; she took her place by her mother's side, and, save looking a little wan and feeble, was the same Caroline, gentle, kind, and thoughtful, whom I had ever known.

And where was Constance? Had she given way beneath

that blow which had uprooted love and laid her hopes in the dust?

Her cheeks were pale, and her voice at times tremulous, that was all! But they were early days yet, and the memory of a first love—when it is *bonâ fide*—sinks deep in the heart, and leaves scars thereon which are hard to get rid of. I was at first doubtful whether the particulars of the lovers' quarrel were known to any of the Woodleigh family; all seemed to be moving in the ordinary channel; Aunt Woodleigh was as prosy as ever, Mary as quiet, and Caroline, for all her weakness, not in the slightest degree discomposed. The day did not pass without satisfying my curiosity.

I was sitting in the drawing-room wherein high words had been interchanged, Aunt Woodleigh and Caroline my companions. Mary and Constance were in their dressing-rooms preparing for a little journey to the railway station, whither I was to accompany them and wait for Upton's arrival, and Miss Heberdeen had already left for London, escorted by that most faithful of swains, Richard Woodleigh.

Aunt Woodleigh had a peculiar facility for falling asleep when the conversation was badly sustained, and that evening, in particular, my aunt's head, after sundry spasmodic dives, rested placidly on her bosom.

I was staring at the fire, as Heberdeen had stared some twenty-four hours since, when Caroline startled me by touching my hand with hers.

"Robert," she said, in a low voice, "there was a quarrel between you and Mr. Heberdeen last night, I hear."

"Yes."

"Followed by a quarrel between Mr. Heberdeen and Constance; a lovers' quarrel, founded on nothing but doubts which were groundless and unjust. You know the termination?"

"The engagement is at an end," I said.

"Yes, so Constance says—so Mr. Heberdeen has said before. Poor Constance, she tries to bear her troubles well; but it is a poor struggle—she is not strong-minded."

"Every day will help to heal the wound, Caroline."

"You don't know her," said Caroline; "more, you don't know any of us Woodleighs. We make up our minds to a purpose, or we set our hearts on an idol, and be it for good or for evil, we remain ever unchangeable."

I thought for how long a time I, a Woodleigh too, had set my heart on Constance; for how long a time, amidst hope and despair—the sunshine and the storm—the idol had been reared for my worship!

“Constance is hiding her sorrows from me as well as from mother,” said Caroline; “treating them lightly and forcing the smiles to her lips, lest her own agitation should add to my weakness.”

“Do you think that?” I asked, moodily.

“I am sure of it. I have not been Constance’s friend and counsellor for so many years without reading her face, like a story; it is an innocent face, that tells all its secrets! Do you know, Robert,” continued Caroline, “she is trying to make me believe that she cares nothing for Heberdeen, and is glad that the engagement is ended? As for the reasons that broke off that engagement, they puzzle me, for Constance evades details concerning them. Therefore, being as curious as most of my sex, Robert, I have been deceitful enough to let mamma fall asleep, in order to coax the truth from my cousin. Now, Sir, I am all attention!”

“But——”

“But go on, Robert,” said Caroline, in a fidgety manner. “Constance will return in five minutes.”

“Will it excite you, Caroline?”

“Not in the least.”

Briefly as possible, and not without blushing, I began the story of the preceding day, of Heberdeen’s arrival at Brighton, his jealousy at finding me with Constance, his following me to the hotel, his contemptuous messages, and his final meeting with me. Caroline listened attentively, and when my narrative was concluded, she said:—

“I did not think Edmund Heberdeen was so headstrong and wilful. Perhaps it is as well all is over, and yet they loved each other very dearly, and would have made, I think, a very happy couple!”

“I do not think they would. He was too proud and overbearing; he was not fit for her; he——”

Two eyes were regarding me with a very sharp expression, and I felt my colour change.

“Finish your sentence, cousin.”

“He was not worthy of her!”

“Robert,” said Caroline, almost sternly, “had Edmund Heberdeen any cause for jealousy?”

"Very little," I answered; "I have kept nothing back—have told you everything that passed between us."

"It was not sufficient to lead to the result, and I have been deceived in you, or some one has made Heberdeen his dupe. Robert," she said, with a sudden start, "where was Richard yesterday?"

"With me."

"Where was—oh! I am very wicked," sighed she, covering her face for a moment with her thin white hands, "and the evil thoughts will never keep away! I am a suspicious woman, distrustful of one it is my duty to esteem, judging a man's whole life and conduct by one erring action. God forgive me!"

"There! my story has excited you."

"No," she said, looking up, "I am very calm. I am not excited in the least."

At this moment Constance and Mary appeared, and Mrs. Woodleigh woke up suddenly.

"Take care of my children, Robert," said my aunt, when we were ready to depart, "and see after Upton at the crossings; he is always so—oh! dear, I forgot Upton was not a little boy—I'm afraid I have been asleep."

"Just dozing, aunt."

"Ah! just dozing—I should have been asleep in another minute, if the girls had not come in. How do you feel to-night Caroline?"

"Quite strong again," said Caroline; "you need not be nervous about me any more, mother!"

It was not a very lively walk to the railway station, Constance being dull and taciturn.

I thought of all the encouragement Dick had bestowed upon me last night over the wine, but it did not lighten my spirits much, with the grave face of Constance at my side.

I discoursed on a great variety of subjects, which Mary chiefly responded to, and Constance walked on in a somnambule manner, favouring me now and then with a hard monosyllable, which came in more often than otherwise in the wrong place and disturbed my current of ideas.

"Still," I thought, "she is not giving way—this is the first day after the loss, and she bears that loss well; there is hope for me in the future! Dick is quite right—what a dear fellow he is, to be sure, and what a fine brother-in-law he will make me!"

We found the London train already at the terminus, and the passengers issuing into the street.

"I hope brother Upton has come," said Mary, looking anxiously round her; "for with Dick, Upton, and Mr. Heberdeen away, how dull it will be to-morrow!"

"Very dull," murmured Constance.

But Upton Woodleigh was close upon us, and ere we could realise the impression of the dull Sunday we should spend, he was in the midst of us, kissing his sisters and shaking me by the hand.

"You are a pretty fellow to wait for me till Saturday, Robert!" said he; "how long have you been in Brighton?"

"Nine days."

"You are the most eccentric being under the sun, I believe," said Upton; "first you keep away months, even years, and then"—his eyes twinkling—"there is no getting rid of you! Upon my word, Mary, I think you must have something to do with it."

Mary laughed and shook her head; Constance laughed too, but it was not the merry laugh of the past, and Upton looked at her curiously.

"I have a hundred questions to ask about Carry, and mother, and the rest, as we proceed homewards," said Upton. "Robert, will you see to Mary? Come, Constance,"—offering her his arm—"time is precious, and I want to ask you question No. 1."

Constance glanced timidly at him; the smiles had left his face, and he was looking as grave as in business hours. He had seen Heberdeen, I was sure of it! Had he come as a messenger of peace, bringing good tidings to Constance, or had Heberdeen formally resigned his pretensions to her hand, and broken the spell which had charmed him?

I offered my arm to my Cousin Mary, thinking seriously of another cousin meanwhile, and we had turned to retrace our steps when a well-known voice, sharp, clear, and ringing, startled me by its propinquity.

"Benedicite! Robert Woodleigh!"

I turned round hastily, and discovered Mr. Markingham and Mr. Bowden by my side; they were arm-in-arm too, and looking quite affectionate and brotherly!

Our party came to a halt again, and I regarded my step-father and my patron with amazement as they shook hands with me and my cousins. Despite the painful reminiscence of

our last meeting, Mr. Bowden was not distant in his manner towards me.

"I hope I see you well, Robert," he said, in his gentlest tones.

Upton Woodleigh blushed and stammered a little as he addressed Mr. Bowden and inquired after the health of his daughter.

"She is quite well, Mr. Woodleigh, thank you—may I hope that Miss Caroline is better?"

Constance answered in the affirmative.

"I have heard a bad report of her health lately. I hope you will think," addressing Upton, "it is from no want of interest in her who watched my poor lady in her last illness that I have refrained from visiting you and making my inquiries; think business, trouble, anything kept me away rather than forgetfulness."

"Well, then, nothing can keep you and Miss Bowden away to-morrow," said Upton, eagerly; "we shall all be very glad to——"

"To-morrow is Sunday," said Mr. Bowden, gravely; "I do not make or receive visits on that day, Mr. Woodleigh!"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, I quite forgot that for the moment. You preach here to-morrow, Sir?"

"Three times."

"Then on Monday, Sir, if you and Miss Bowden are disengaged."

Mr. Bowden shook his head.

"My daughter's time is greatly occupied, and—and—another day, perhaps, we may be enabled to accept the invitation which you have kindly made us."

Upton did not press him further, and Mr. Bowden, who had frowned, and turned red, and been altogether embarrassed, was evidently relieved by the cessation of my cousin's importunity. Upton turned to Mr. Markingham, and Mr. Bowden said to me in a lower tone:

"Have you been in Brighton long?"

"Not a fortnight, Mr. Bowden."

"Are you staying with your cousins, Robert?"

"No, Sir—I have apartments at an hotel."

"With that man still?" in a whisper—"the man I warned you of?"

"Mr. Richard Woodleigh?—Yes."

"Ah!" with a half groan, "you will go your own way,

and no power of mine will ever restrain you. Yet I must not neglect my duty to yourself, to your mother, and if I cannot hinder you from evil, I will point it out, at least. The last time we met, I said in anger, 'I have done with you.' Try and forget those hasty words of mine, boy, and come and see me now and then."

"I will come and see you soon, Sir."

"It is a promise; Mr. Markingham, will you see that it is kept?"

"I will bring him with me, Mr. Bowden," was the answer.

We went our separate ways that night, and I resigned the society of my cousins for the companionship of Mr. Markingham. Mr. Markingham was in a reflective mood all the way to the hotel, and asked no questions about my cousins or myself till we were seated by the fire. Then he took up the poker, and after hammering at the coals a moment, said:—

"Where is Mr. Richard Woodleigh, Robert?"

"He started for London this morning."

"Alone?"

"No, with Miss Heberdeen."

Mr. Markingham battered at the coals again, and fell into another brown study, from which I aroused him by mentioning the name of Mr. Bowden, and expressing my surprise at finding him his companion.

"We met by accident in the railway-carriage," said he, "and having that carriage to ourselves the whole of the journey, were compelled to take refuge in each other's conversation. That conversation was chiefly about you."

"And no one else?" I asked, suspiciously.

"And your sworn brother in arms, Dick Woodleigh."

"What has he said of him?"

"Nothing tangible—nothing to clutch at," said Markingham, angrily; "but there is a something on Mr. Bowden's mind which your friend has put there, and for which he does not thank him. That something is of importance, too, and I must find it out."

"Is it necessary?"

"Woodleigh," said Markingham, "I promised a dying man that I would guard his daughter, and study her happiness in life, and I will keep my word. I never broke it yet."

He let the poker drop with a crash into the fender, and sprang to his feet.

"She shall not marry a man on whom suspicion rests. I am her guardian, and she shall not be sacrificed!"

He sank into his chair again and said:—

"I came to study Richard Woodleigh, and he vanishes away!"

"He will return on Monday."

"But you are left," he said, not heeding my remark; "and by all our friendship, as brothers, as father and son, as what you will, I ask you for your confidence, your old confidence of the past, Woodleigh!"

"I have nothing to conceal from you, Mr. Markingham."

"Then, will you answer one question unreservedly?"

"Yes."

"I ask then for your true opinion of Richard Woodleigh's character."

"I cannot give it you," I replied. "It is a mystery to me."

"Ha! you distrust him too?"

"No, but I meet with those who do, and I am in the dark as to their reasons. I find Richard Woodleigh a frank, impetuous, careless friend, but one always ready to help or advise me. I am his companion, I see him almost every day, and I witness much to admire and but little to distrust. Why should those doubts perplex me which beset you and Mr. Bowden?"

"There is a mystery about him, and where there is a mystery doubts will naturally exist," said Markingham; "he is a designing man, or has designing enemies, and I will discover which."

A few days after that dialogue, when Mr. Markingham was still at Brighton and Richard Woodleigh had returned, when Caroline was rapidly recovering her strength, and Constance was getting pale and weak, when Upton had gone back to London, and I was becoming convinced of the hopeless nature of my passion—that old passion from which there was no escaping—a letter came for Mr. Markingham.

He was sitting at the breakfast-table as the letter was delivered to him, and Richard Woodleigh and I were facing him. He flushed a little at the hand-writing, but that was the only sign of emotion which betrayed itself as he broke the seal and read the letter carefully.

"I hope I stand excused, gentlemen," said he, "for attending to business of a private nature in this goodly company."

"No bad news, I hope, Sir?" asked Dick.

Mr. Markingham considered that question for awhile before he answered it, stirring at his cup of chocolate meanwhile.

"What would you consider bad news?" he asked at last.

"It does not require a wise man to answer that, Mr. Markingham," replied my cousin; "loss of friends and loss of fortune make up three-fourths of all the bad news in the world."

"Yet both may make us happier."

"How so?"

"We may lose those whose friendship does us harm, and the fortune that slips from our grasp may benefit the more deserving; and make us better men."

"I hope such happy news was not contained in your letter, Mr. Markingham."

"You shall know when I return."

"Are you going out, Sir?" I asked.

"To London—at once," said Markingham, rising; "I have a duty to perform, and delay is always dangerous. I shall be back to-morrow."

Half-an-hour hence the London train was rattling on its way, and Mr. Markingham, full of his sense of duty, was borne with it from the Sussex coast. That same day a letter reached Richard Woodleigh, which, after being attentively perused, was tossed contemptuously on the table.

"From Edmund Heberdeen," explained Dick, "who has gone raving mad."

"Are you jesting?"

"Not mad with love, as your romantic thoughts have probably suggested, but with a more dry and unpoetical disease—law."

"Has he not had enough of law by this time?"

"No," answered Dick; "he writes word that he is anxious to see me—anxious to bother me, he means, with all the dusty details of the confounded estate at Nettleton—that the case is almost clear, that a deed has been discovered, signed by Mr. Markingham's father, which proves that he had a perfect right to dispose of his property, and that it was not strictly entailed on your respectable patron. Very true, and perhaps a grand discovery, but what a foolish way to make it public!"

"Has he made it public?"

"Yes, he has thrown himself on the bosom of the lawyers, put his case in their hands, and will lose the rest of his small

fortune, and be no nearer his object. Lose his sister's money too—damn it !” exclaimed Dick, turning pale, “ I never thought of that ! ”

“ Mr. Markingham's letter must have been a notice of a new action.”

“ Ah—yes—something or other,” said Dick, in an absent manner ; “ and Markingham will fire up at the attack, and harass the enemy in a thousand different ways ; Heberdeen will have to resign his snug government berth to defend himself, and all will go to rack and ruin in no time. He writes like a fool—like a reckless mad fool, as he is ! ”

“ Shall you return to London at once ? ”

Dick bit his finger nails and looked at the fire, walked to the window and looked at the sea, dropped into a chair and confined his gaze to one particular spot on the carpet. When I fancied that he had forgotten my question, he said :—

“ No, let him go his own way. I can only give him warning to stop, and his pride—curse his pride !—won't let him do that. If he had only gone first to Markingham, he might have sold his chance for a few thousand pounds, which would have done him good and Markingham no harm. Now, he has flung down the gauntlet, let him fight his own battles whilst his money lasts.”

“ And Miss Heberdeen's.”

“ No,” said Dick, with a stamp of his foot ; “ not if I have a voice in the matter.”

Dick was troubled in his mind all that day and the next. He was anxious for Mr. Markingham's return ; anxious too, despite his assertions to the contrary, to get to London. Still he lingered, wrote more than once to Heberdeen, and evinced evident signs of impatience as day after day passed and no Mr. Markingham arrived with news of the law-suit.

That law-suit troubled me too, led me into deep speculation concerning the effect it would have on my fortunes, supposing Heberdeen came off the victor. For the first time too it struck me that my friend Richard was playing a double game, was waiting to learn Markingham's plans before he decided on his own course of action, and although I scouted the suspicion as a base and unworthy one, it flitted before me in my thoughtful moments, by the side of my friend, even at the “ Warwick,” where sat Constance with no jealous lover to guard her !

CHAPTER IV

AWAKENING.

A WEEK before the Christmas of 1848, when Caroline was well again and Constance was more thoughtful still, Mr. Markingham reappeared at Brighton. He arrived at the hotel about seven in the evening, and his first orders were for his dressing-gown and meerschaum. He was in excellent spirits, quite gay, in fact, for as he filled his gold-mounted pipe he hummed an opera air over it.

Richard Woodleigh and I were his companions by the fireside, were both waiting with anxiety for those revelations which it might please him to make. I was doubtful whether he would be particularly communicative before my cousin, and the same thought crossed Dick Woodleigh's mind, though Dick was wise enough to know that his best policy was silence. Mr. Markingham, however, was full of his subject, and began at once.

"Have you heard from Mr. Heberdeen, Mr. Woodleigh?"

"Not this week, Sir."

"Possibly he has informed you of the action that he was kind enough to bring against me."

"Yes, and I am very much surprised and grieved."

"Grieved, Sir!—why?"

Mr. Markingham took his pipe from his lips, and curled the ends of his long grey moustache. He appeared interested in Dick Woodleigh that night; his whole conversation was addressed to him.

"Grieved to think his stock of common sense was so small," replied Dick; "that his experience of the 'glorious uncertainty of the law' did not assure him of the chances against him."

"Do you think Brooke was right then when he sang:—

'The laws they were made for the little;
The laws they were made for the little;
It is not by right,
But by wrong-doing might,
That giants still 'scape a committal!'

"Brooke was not far out in his satire," answered Richard Woodleigh.

Mr. Markingham resumed his pipe and was silent several minutes. I could see his grey eyes twinkling through the smoke as they were fixed upon my friend.

"Mr. Heberdeen is a young man of spirit," continued Mr. Markingham, "and did not study costs, or think much of his time, when he entered the lists against me. He might have acted more gracefully—perhaps more gratefully—but, still, I do not blame a man who fights for a cause that he thinks is a just one."

"When he is sure to be ruined in the end, it matters little whether it be a just cause or not," said Dick Woodleigh.

"It matters to the conscience, I think, Mr. Woodleigh."

"Oh! of course, to the conscience—I was not thinking of that."

"No," said Markingham, drily; "you were not! However, I fought once in a good cause and won the battle, and now I must still fight in what to a certain extent is a bad cause, for I attack with my riches the just rights of my opponent. That attack is too strong for young Heberdeen's purse."

"Not a doubt of it," said Woodleigh.

"I have seen him and told him so, but he has become very obstinate and reckless, and will not listen to reason. I told him, also, that it would have been more kind to have laid the case before me, and he drew himself up stiffly, and said, 'You gave no warning to my father, Mr. Markingham!'"

"That's Ned Heberdeen all over," muttered Dick.

"I might have bought off the action for six or seven thousand pounds had he met me in a friendly spirit."

"The very thing I told Robert!"

"Or have settled four or five hundred a-year on Miss Heberdeen, if that would have been more desirable."

"Did you make that proposition to him, Sir?" asked Dick Woodleigh.

"Well, no. He would have looked at it in the light of a bribe for his silence, and seen dishonour in accepting it; he has very rigid notions, has young Heberdeen."

"What does he expect?" said Dick.

"Perhaps he is sanguine of success, and in that belief will spend his last penny, his sister's last penny too, in a cause that is hopeless."

"Hopeless!" repeated Dick, mechanically.

"Ay, in the hands of the pettifoggers he has fallen amongst, —fifth-rate land-sharks, who care nothing for the interests of

their client, and everything for their own. I can afford to return to my sea-side quarters and the pleasures to which this gay place invites me, knowing the weakness of my enemy and the strength of my cause. You look thoughtful, Robert; don't you admire my resolve to fight to the last, knowing the children of my rival, enemy, and old friend must sink before me?"

"No," I answered.

"Well, it troubled me till I investigated the rights and wrongs of the case, and then I cut the Gordian knot at one blow. It is all settled now."

Dick Woodleigh looked up with eager eyes.

"Settled to the amazement of all the lawyers in Christendom, who never saw a finer case for themselves! Settled by restoring to the Heberdeens one-half of my fortune; settled with satisfaction to the article we don't altogether study in matters personal, Mr. Woodleigh—the conscience that we were speaking of just now."

"Have you — have you given in to their claim?—left it wholly uncontested — lost half your property?" asked Dick Woodleigh.

"More—there are some arrears to the good."

"Mr. Markingham," cried Dick, starting up and shaking him by both hands, dropping the one which had the pipe in it rather hastily again, "I am amazed at this extraordinary proof of a noble nature—it is grand and sublime, Sir! It is worthy of record in the annals of heroic men. Half your fortune to the Heberdeens—your enemies."

"No, my particular friends," said Markingham, rising and releasing his hand rather hastily; "my very dear and honoured friends, Sir!"

There was something strange in the reply, something haughty in the way in which it was delivered. Mr. Markingham had laid aside his pipe, and was standing with his dressing-gown wrapped round him. Richard Woodleigh, at a little distance, was lowering from under his bent brows, puzzled at his manner, doubtful of what was coming next, of what the bright light in the keen grey eyes portended.

"My very dear and honoured friends," repeated Markingham, "whom their father, with his dying breath, entrusted to my care. They have been my care from that day; I have not neglected them. Standing in the background, I have been observant of their danger."

"I was not aware of any danger impending over the Heberdeens," said Dick.

"There are dangers hanging over the best and worst of us," said Markingham, "hanging by a single hair. We tread the allotted path, and walk on darkly, dreamily, ignorant of what is waiting in the distance. You and I, Mr. Woodleigh, may be marching forward, confident in our attractions, our powers to charm and lead astray, and yet the pitfall may be open, waiting!"

Dick Woodleigh regarded the speaker with curiosity, flinched a little, too, beneath the steady light in the eyes of Mr. Markingham. He resumed his seat, however, without making any comment upon Mr. Markingham's last speech, and the gentleman who had delivered it, after appearing for a moment vexed at his own vehemence, hastily left the room.

"Mr. Markingham is excited to-night," said Dick, shrugging his shoulders. "I wonder what he has been driving at? He's a queer fish."

"He's a shrewd man, Dick."

"Ay, and a benevolent being, too," responded Dick. "One of the old school, who don't turn up nowadays very often. God bless his grey hairs, he has been the making of me! Where's Bradshaw? There was a copy on the table half-an-hour ago."

He jumped up again and looked for the railway guide, which having obtained, he began to scrutinise with eagerness.

"I must hasten to congratulate Harriet on her good fortune," he said, suddenly closing the book; "must see Heberdeen and his sister early to-morrow."

He walked to the door.

"Are you going out?"

"I shall leave Brighton to-night by the next train," he said coldly, so coldly that I felt my face burn; "you, of course, will remain with Mr. Markingham. We shall meet in London *presently*. Good-bye."

He was gone—*gone for ever!*—and I sat surveying the door, which he had left open behind him, with a very stupid expression of countenance. Presently Mr. Markingham returned.

"Has Mr. Woodleigh gone?" he asked, after a sharp glance round the room.

"Yes—to London."

"So, so — to marry Miss Heberdeen at once perhaps —

impetuous lover. Now, Robert, try and remember something!"

"Well, Sir?"

"Where was Richard Woodleigh when Miss Bowden left Grove House?"

I looked up; that question had given life to fresh doubts.

"At home; he had been home from college one day, I believe."

"And he was engaged to Miss Heberdeen then?"

"Yes."

"Put on your hat and come with me."

I complied with his request, and we were shortly in the lighted streets.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To Mr. Bowden's apartments—he is still in Brighton."

"Have you his address?"

"Yes. The day I met him in the train he was anxious that I should bring you to his house—now I will keep my promise."

As we walked on hurriedly, I could feel Markingham's arm shake within my own.

"I am clinging to a frail hope, perhaps," said Markingham; "building my castle on the sands, and yet believing in its firmness. Yet how that hope has haunted me since that meeting with your step-father—how I trust in it even now! If the hope die out, and the castle fall, why, God help Harriet Heberdeen!"

He did not speak again till we were standing in a square before the door of a handsome mansion. There was a gas-lamp over the door, and Markingham referred by its light to a card he held in his hand.

"This is right; in another hour, Robert, we may know the worst or best."

He knocked, and the servant who responded to our summons took up our cards to the popular preacher, who was at home, and who met us, in his eagerness, upon the stairs.

"This is kind of you, Robert," he said, grasping both my hands—"you have not quite forgotten me, then. Ah! Mr. Markingham, I hope I see you well."

He led the way to a room on the first floor, where Miss Bowden was seated, surrounded by books and papers. She rose as we entered, shook hands with me, gracefully acknowledged her father's introduction of Mr. Markingham to her, blushed a

little at the earnest gaze which that gentleman bestowed upon her.

"You must excuse the evidence of Miss Bowden's studies," said Mr. Bowden, as his daughter hurriedly gathered her papers and books together; "but time to her, as well as me, has been valuable of late. I fear she is studying time too much and her health too little, for the only benefit she derives from the sea-breeze is obtained through these windows. And a sea-breeze in December, when you are sitting still, is too much of a luxury."

"Not for me," said Miss Bowden, smiling.

"Well, you will be the sufferer by it, dear; I am not often exposed to its effects."

"I wish you were—yet no, you are doing good, although your constant travelling keeps me anxious."

This was a strange change—father and daughter in the past so hard and unyielding, and in the present evincing such affection! Mr. Bowden saw my look of surprise, and said:—

"You can't reconcile the old times with the new, Robert, or believe that we have both forgotten and forgiven everything, yet it is true."

"Not that we have forgotten everything, father?" said Miss Bowden, in a low voice; "thank God, the memory of the past is a beacon to warn us, and a charm to make the present more happy."

"Yes," said he, thoughtfully, "and I think Robert has a right to know the secret which has made us content. Shall I tell him?"

"Better leave it till an opportunity more fitting," murmured Miss Bowden, with a glance towards Mr. Markingham.

"I object to procrastination."

"But——"

"But——"

Father and daughter looked into each other's face, stopped, and laughed.

"You see we are still a little obstinate," said Miss Bowden to me; "fond of argument and contradiction! Father, will you tell him? I think it is best, if Mr. Markingham has no objection."

Mr. Markingham bowed courteously, and muttered, "Not the slightest objection," and neither father nor daughter noticed his suppressed agitation, his manifest impatience.

We were sitting round the fire, Miss Bowden by her father's side, when my step-father began.

"The secret of our present happiness—so far as there can be happiness for me," his face shadowing a moment beneath the consciousness of an irreparable loss, "is this—confidence, implicit confidence in one another ; a knowledge of each other's character, its strength and weakness ; a love that studies to give way, never to resist ! Had we but had faith in the goodness of each other's motives years before, Mely !"

"There is always something to repent of in the past," said Mr. Markingham.

"Yes, Sir, and I, though a preacher of the Word, have much to look back at and regret. Pride, obstinacy, a violent temper, a——"

"Father, father !"

"It's quite true, my child ; I'm not ashamed to own those faults which led to our disunion."

"Both our faults."

"Yes, both. Robert, did your—your—ahem—mother ever tell you the story ?"

"No, Sir."

"I will tell you now."

"Is it a long one ?" began Mr. Markingham, "for I——"

But Mr. Bowden, with his usual impetuosity, had already begun.

"My dear daughter, Robert, you will be surprised to learn, is possessed of a great gift ; that gift which makes the poet, the novelist, and the man of letters—Imagination. You will be still more surprised to learn that years ago, before I came to Nettleton, I thought that gift was sent as a curse to us both, or was a design of the Evil One for the destruction of her soul. I strove to crush out, in my narrow-minded bigotry, every spark from the fire of genius which God had lighted in her ; I set my ban and interdict upon it. My daughter also was of a fiery, passionate nature, impatient of control, ambitious of a name, was encouraged too by her poor mother to secretly prosecute her studies, and the result was a coldness and an estrangement which grew stronger every day. At last her mother died, and we, two stubborn natures, were left alone together. We were poor, at that time very poor, and one day when trial and trouble had drawn us closer together for the moment, she told me tremblingly, yet proudly, of a book that she had written and had hopes of selling. I burned the book that night !

Miss Bowden coloured at the reminiscence, but her hand stole into her father's and remained there, pledge of forgiveness for an act that was never forgotten!

"Yes, I destroyed the labour of years in my wilful ignorance of what the book contained. I was content to know that it was a work of fiction—I had no belief then in the power of fiction to warn, instruct, offer example, or teach a moral, and I crushed by my action every hope which she had fostered. What might have followed, God knows, if we had stayed together, for we loved each other, and love overlooks all faults, but——"

He paused.

"But I left him, in my cruel anger, childless," added Miss Bowden, "stung by a wrong which time might have set right. In my after struggles with the world I brooded on that wrong until to my diseased mind it became an injury not to be atoned for. I——"

"Enough, Mely," said Mr. Bowden, "when you heard by chance that I was in the world alone and a sufferer, you took a daughter's place, and have been a comfort and a blessing to me ever since."

"And you have removed your interdict, opened to me a field for my labour, rendered me as proud and ambitious as ever!"

"Have your literary labours been crowned with success, Miss Bowden?" asked Mr. Markingham.

"A moderate success, Sir," was the bashful answer.

"And the name of the first work," I said. "Is it 'Behind the Mask?'"

"Is it a fair question to ask a lady who is behind the mask herself?" replied Miss Bowden.

"This is a time to ask many questions, Miss Bowden," said Mr. Markingham, impatiently; "questions which affect the life-happiness of more than one, and we have come hither hoping that you will answer them."

Mr. Bowden and his daughter regarded Mr. Markingham with no small astonishment.

"I break the ice in a rough manner, and I ask your pardon," continued Mr. Markingham, exhibiting an excitement that I had seldom witnessed in him; "but every minute to me is precious, and an hour too late may be the misery of a life. Mr. Bowden, some weeks ago you spoke of a warning given to your step-son."

"A warning that was unheeded," said Mr. Bowden.

"Believing my influence over him was greater than your own, you repeated that warning to me?"

Mr. Bowden nodded.

"We ask you now, Sir, for the proof of your suspicions against Richard Woodleigh—we ask it as a favour."

Miss Bowden sat silent and motionless by her father's side, her hands locked together rigidly.

"Is not my word sufficient?" answered Mr. Bowden, proudly.

"Not sufficient for the end we have in view," was the reply; "not sufficient to undermine the trust of years."

"We can give no other," said Mr. Bowden; "it is impossible. If Robert will not take my word and cast Richard Woodleigh off, close his ears to his counsel as he would to the hissing of a serpent, I cannot help it. My promise to my daughter, my own pride in that daughter, will not let me speak! But, Robert," he added earnestly, "if that warning has had its effect at last, and led you hither for confirmation of your doubts, this is a happy night for me."

"Miss Bowden," said Markingham, "you must forgive me if I pain you,—I, a stranger; but I ask you, by your woman's heart, by your sympathy with your sex, by your power to save the innocent from evil, to clear away this mystery!"

Miss Bowden set her lips more closely as she answered:—

"No, Sir."

"It is not for Robert's sake; it is for the sake of a loving, trusting woman!"

"Is she blind?" was the sharp query.

"Blind to the faults of him she loves—who is not?"

"There will come an awakening, Sir," replied Miss Bowden. "Richard Woodleigh, with all his art—his specious show of virtues—his watch over himself; his care to study the weakness of those by whom he seeks to profit—will betray the blackness of his heart some day. Till that day comes," said she, passionately, "let her wait, as *I* waited."

"No, Miss Bowden, she must wait no longer. Richard Woodleigh has deceived her for years, and there is fresh incentive for disguise now her prospects in life are brightening. This time the mask will not drop till the word is spoken that makes her wife and victim!"

"You speak of Miss Heberdeen?" murmured Miss Bowden.

"Yes."

"So long dazzled by the flame, and still fluttering round the

fire that may consume her ! And yet, may he not love her, Sir, in earnest ?—she is a beautiful and gentle woman. Robert,” turning to me with a startling precipitancy, “ was she engaged to him before I left Grove House ? ”

“ Oh, yes—some months.”

She drew a long breath, and muttered :—

“ The villain to us both ! He loves her not ; he has never known what a pure passion is ! ”

“ Miss Bowden,” said Markingham, rising, “ I charge you by your love of justice, by your duty to your neighbour and your God, to thwart the machinations of that man. If you, knowing his unworthiness, can let an innocent girl be sacrificed, there is no woman’s nature—woman’s feelings in you ! Mr. Bowden, I ask you to assist me by your efforts ; you are a minister of the Gospel, anxious to save souls, there may be one lost ere the week is ended. I seek no explanation for myself, I can imagine the studied villainy from which your daughter has escaped ; but Miss Heberdeen has a right to hear that story, and no false pride should thwart its revelation.”

“ You are right, Sir,” answered Mr. Bowden, “ it must be told ! Amelia, have I any influence over you ? ”

“ It will not be required, father,” said Miss Bowden ; “ the secret has been kept too long already. If Miss Heberdeen be on the eve of marriage with that man, I will tell her all ; tell her of the poor sinful outcast he would have made of me, if God had not helped me in my hour of need. I have been silent as much for the sake of those who loved him and who were kind to me, as for myself, and now, Sir, silence would be a deadly sin. Let the idol fall to pieces, it is best for her, poor girl ! Mr. Markingham, you may command me.”

“ Miss Heberdeen is in town—has recently come into the possession of thirty thousand pounds. Richard Woodleigh, poor in purse, unprincipled and heartless, left in haste for London this evening.”

Miss Bowden started to her feet with flashing eyes. There was no longer any hesitation to hold back the story, to put off the hour of her confession—a confession, I felt assured, of a trusting woman’s heart, and of her nearness to that brink from which the fall is fatal ! Impulsive, eager to begone upon her painful mission, she said :

“ Father, you leave to-morrow for London—you have to preach there in the evening—will you go to-night instead, and take me with you ? ”

"Willingly," said Mr. Bowden, rising.

"You will allow me to accompany you," said Mr. Markingham; "Miss Heberdeen is not strong, and it takes but little to unnerve her. I am an old friend of hers, and would prepare her for the shock."

"Right, Sir," said Mr. Bowden, catching the general infection of impatience, "there is nothing to delay you, I hope, Mr. Markingham? Minutes are valuable in a time of danger."

"Nothing, Sir," was the answer. "Robert, when will you join us in London?"

"I shall return with my cousins to-morrow, Sir."

Half-an-hour afterwards they were on their way to London, following fast upon the track of Richard Woodleigh. Half-an-hour afterwards I was at the hotel again, sitting in the room where the true friend and the false had set some hours ago. Before the fire, staring at the fitful blaze, fair type of my will and moral strength, that flickered faintly, sprang into light and life, and then died out again—I thought of the dupe that I had been in my conceit and blindness. I saw that my future prospects, my command of money, had drawn,—as it always draws,—the cunning and false around me, and I had taken them to my heart and revered them as friends. Future prospects and money at command, what had they done for me but generated idleness, and led me into temptation, extravagance and folly?—taught me reliance on the stranger, but no trust in myself! Did a voice from a purer world than this—a mother's voice—whisper to my heart that night, wake me from my lethargy, and teach me much that was my duty? I think so now!



CHAPTER V

REPARATION.

IF Richard Woodleigh had been anxious to see me married to his sister Constance, knowing that his power over me and my money would have been greater than his influence over Edmund Heberdeen, if he had been really the bold and unscrupulous schemer, would he have considered much the means to the end he had in view? Would he not have related to me

false stories, of Constance's affection for me before her engagement?—have studied the headstrong nature of Heberdeen, and stung his heart with doubts? Would he have scrupled at a thousand lies to advance one step nearer to his project, or thought for an instant of the happiness of others that might be sacrificed through his dark agency?

And he had deceived me, filled me with hope and love, and fomented jealousy in the heart of my rival; he had passed from one to the other, playing his part carefully, and never overacting it, masking all beneath the name of friend.

I knew it when it was too late; I read it in the face of Constance Woodleigh, in the sorrow disguised by pride, in the effort to be as she had ever been, in Caroline's concern for her, in my own consciousness of the hopeless nature of my dreams.

I gave up the chase again, that weary, foolish love-chase, begun early, ended now for ever, and relinquished silently every chance of winning her. It was no great struggle; I was even surprised at the ease with which I resigned all thoughts of her, and the little pain it caused me in so doing. There were none of the past feelings of despair to unnerve me, or that sense of being cut adrift from a great purpose and launched on a sea of uncertainty.

There was left me a duty to perform, and I did not shrink from it. I had been the means of parting Heberdeen and Constance; it might be in my power to reunite them. Much that had helped to sunder them was attributable to Richard Woodleigh's scheming; it was my place to discover to what extent that scheming had been carried.

In the beginning of the year 1849, three weeks after the return of my cousins to Grove House, I made Caroline Woodleigh my confidant. I felt less reluctance in confessing my folly to her than to Stephen Markingham. During those three weeks nothing had been heard or seen of Cousin Dick; I knew that his engagement with Miss Heberdeen was broken off, and that Miss Heberdeen was ill.

I have said that I made Caroline Woodleigh my confidant. One day, early in the new year, when we were for a few minutes alone together, I told the story of the strange revival of my hopes, and acknowledged that the jealousy of Heberdeen was not wholly groundless. I had no need to add the name of him who planted anew those hopes in my heart, for my confession was hardly ended when she said:—

“Richard, he was your adviser then?”

"Yes," I answered.

"I have mistrusted him since my father's death," she said hastily ; "and have even reproached myself for my suspicions. Alas ! they were not misplaced, I felt they were not, even by that false air of frankness which has misled so many. For his sake, in the hope that he had repented much that was guilty in the past, I have tried to love him like a sister and—have failed ! That evil past, but known *now* to him and me, has stood between us and kept us ever watchful, cold, and distant."

"And yet I trusted him, despised the warnings of my friends—the warnings which your looks conveyed."

"Those who know Richard Woodleigh thoroughly will not be surprised at that," she said ; "and many who have known him all his life are still deceived—mother, sisters, brother amongst the number."

"Is it right, Caroline, that they should trust the false ?"

"I think so," she replied ; "for it would kill my mother, and my sisters are happy in their ignorance. There is only Upton who may suffer by my silence—by my promise to a dying father. Poor Upton, though he knows there is a secret, his honest heart will not suspect his brother. But we are wandering from the subject," she said, suddenly becoming grave, almost stern ; "we were talking of your follies."

"True."

"Will the follies ever end ?"

"I hope so."

"Hope without effort never worked good yet, Robert," she said ; "you will live on in idleness, for the habits of the past have become a chain of iron."

"I will break it, for I am tired of this life. Caroline, you must advise me how to act—you——"

"Advise you," she exclaimed, angrily ; "what advice can I offer, or you profit by ? You are your own wilful master, you will be so for ever."

"You do not know what thoughts I have had lately"

"Thoughts of Constance, were they not ?" she answered with a bitterness that took me by surprise ; "thoughts of her engagement, and how to put an end to it ? You have been lucky, Sir ; the lovers are parted ; perseverance has but to follow up the chase and win that prize which has been the study of your life !"

"No ; the Woodleigh love-chase ended, Caroline, when my eyes were opened to deceit. It is a prize no longer to me—I

do not seek it, wish it. My presence here has marred the happiness of more than one; I will make an effort to restore that happiness, and then——”

“And then?” said Caroline, anxiously.

“I will go away for ever—go beyond the seas again, and seek my own fortune.”

“Is not England wide enough for you?”

“No.”

“And what is this one effort you will make?”

“To reunite those whom I have helped to sunder,” was my answer; “to see Heberdeen and explain my share of the folly which robbed him of happiness.”

“Will Constance thank you?” said Caroline, thoughtfully; “is it even for Constance’s interest to let the jealous and head-strong return again to her side? It has been no lovers’ quarrel, and the way to reconciliation is not easy. The words were harsh, his accusations unjust, and my sister suffers from them still!”

“What may not Richard have said to Heberdeen?”

“True; Heberdeen may have been deceived—it is as well to solve the mystery, and it is—shall I flatter you?—a noble act of Robert Woodleigh’s.”

“I will go at once,” said I, springing up.

“Impulsive as ever, Robert,” she said with a smile; “and, for once, on the right side. There is one thing you must remember, cousin,—you go to explain, not to seek an explanation. If his pride will not give one to Constance or himself, then he is unworthy of my sister’s heart, and Constance’s life will be happier alone.”

I left Grove House immediately. Full of my one purpose, I went straight to the house of my rival, who had not given up Great Coram Street or abandoned office business.

“Mr. Heberdeen was at home; would I be good enough to state my name, or send up my card?”

“Be kind enough to say a gentleman desires a few minutes’ conversation with him.”

The servant departed with my message, and I stood alone in the waiting-room, experiencing no enviable feelings. Noble and honourable may be the task of the peacemaker, but his sensations are not always delightful!

Footsteps on the stairs, a martial stride along the passage, a quick movement of the handle of the door, and then Edmund Heberdeen was before me. He was looking very pale and

stern; the return of half his father's fortune had not smoothed the furrows over his eyes, or given him the most contented expression of countenance. He gave a visible start at recognising me, and then, making the most of his height, said haughtily :—

"Mr. Woodleigh, the honour of your visit takes me by surprise."

"I have come to perform a just, but painful duty, Mr. Heberdeen," was my reply; "to explain much that was in the past mysterious. I have come alone, and unprompted."

"I wish to hear nothing concerning the past, Mr. Woodleigh," said Heberdeen; "it is full of bitter memories—it has deceived me. Your time for explanation has arrived too late, Sir!"

He bowed, as if with the intention of retiring, but I said, quickly :—

"It is never too late for the confession of a wrong. I believe, Mr. Heberdeen, that I have injured you in that past which you accuse, injured you in part wilfully, in part unwillingly, and for both I have to express my deep regret."

Edmund Heberdeen looked surprised as he replied :—

"I have heard a great deal of you in my time, Mr. Woodleigh; have been told that you were selfish, passionate, obstinate, and proud, but I have never been led to expect—have never in my own observation witnessed—that your leading virtue was humility."

"Neither is it, Sir," I replied; "and the faults which a kind friend has pointed out to you are true enough; I acknowledge them. Stating so much, perhaps you will believe that they were no light struggles of remorse that brought me to your house."

"This is a penitence I do not understand," said Heberdeen, still distant.

At any other time, or in a case less urgent, I should have long since lost my temper, but I had made a promise to myself, and was resolved to keep it.

"Let me explain, then, and relieve you from my unwelcome presence," I said. "Mr. Heberdeen, we once had a friend, named Richard Woodleigh."

"Not a word of him, Sir," exclaimed Heberdeen; "he was a false traitor, and I will not hear his name!"

"I must speak of him for a few moments," I said, hastily; "I will be brief enough. May I ask a question?"

Heberdeen did not answer, and taking silence for consent, I said :

"Has it not lately struck you that Richard Woodleigh's part of traitor was played to more than one?"

Heberdeen breathed hard.

"Was played to you, to me, to Constance Woodleigh, deceiving all of us?"

"Well, well," he said, impatiently.

"Let me tell you how he deceived me; it will be my explanation also," I continued; "he led me, by hints and artful suggestions, to believe that his sister Constance had ever loved me, and that her affection had been only turned aside by the studied efforts of certain members of her family; that the engagement between you and my cousin was on the eve of a disruption—that she had never loved you in her heart! Presenting this before me constantly, flattering my weakness and my vanity, reviving in me old thoughts and hopes, he set me dreaming on a future that could never be. He made me your rival, sought every opportunity of bringing me and Constance together, and every opportunity of thwarting you!"

"Is all this true?" exclaimed Heberdeen, wildly. "Yes, yes, I see all now; you were his dupe as well as I! He set me against you, filled me with hate, distrust, and jealousy, spoke of your wealth and expectations, and the power it had to influence Upton, your aunt, even Constance, in your favour. It was a deep and dangerous game to play."

"If we had but met on the afternoon of that day which ended your engagement."

"If *we* had met, Sir!" passionately interrupted Heberdeen—"if one spark of that feeling which has brought us face to face again had been existent then, you would have saved me from a life's unhappiness. I came that day to see you, to ask you calmly and earnestly the reason for your attention to my betrothed,—came, even at Constance's suggestion, to ask your pardon for my rudeness of the morning. I lowered *my* pride then, and begged an interview. I was miserable, full of suspicions, anxious for the explanation then which you declined, and which now, unsolicited, you come to make. Too late, Sir—too late!"

"Did you not come to demand that explanation as your right, to interdict my visits to the 'Warwick,' to refuse all communication with me save through Richard Woodleigh?"

"No!"

"He is a greater villain than I thought him!"

"Did *you* not send down a refusal to see or listen to me?"

Did you not even taunt me till my heart was full of rage and hate, and I could have seen no virtues in an angel? Oh! I have been a fool and madman!"

"One thing more, before I leave you," I said. "Your own actions sundered you from Constance Woodleigh, not mine or hers! In all my life, before, during, or after your engagement, I have never received one word of encouragement from her, one look which could give me hope to win her. I have followed the shadows, and trusted in false friends—it is over now; I am awakening at last!"

"And Constance," said Heberdeen gloomily, "is she well?"

"No."

"She does not think—she does not wish—she cannot, after what has passed——" he began in an excited manner.

"I can say nothing. I have done my duty—your heart should prompt you what is yours. Good-night."

Heberdeen caught me by the hand.

"I have not thanked you yet, Woodleigh."

"I want no thanks," I muttered, striving to release my hand from his clasp; "my conscience, which is not quite dead yet, thanks me sufficiently. I came for my own sake, and in justice to her I shall see only once again in life, not," I added sternly, "for *your* comfort, Edmund Heberdeen!"

He dropped my hand, his proud look returned, softened again, vanished.

"Still I thank you for teaching me my duty and setting me an example which, however painful, shall be at once performed, God willing."

We parted not there—it was in the lighted streets outside that we went our separate ways, both agitated, thoughtful; I to the house of my patron, who was becoming thoughtful too, he to the feet of her he had loved and had lost.

CHAPTER VI.

MORE SECRETS THAN ONE.

SINCE my eyes had been opened to the deceit of Richard Woodleigh, had I altered for the better? Had I been taught

the weak point of my character?—found who were friends and who were enemies at last, and learned no lesson?

Yes, the lesson had been learned, and I was not ungrateful to my teachers. I no longer avoided my step-father; I sought his home, heard him tell me of my faults—in how new and gentle a manner—listened even to all my mother said and hoped of me before she died! Still there was the same restless spirit in my breast chafing and exciting me—I was alone in the world without a purpose—I was still dependent on Mr. Markingham! My step-father silently studied the signs of my awakening, and waited his opportunity to speak. Experience in his duties had taught him that there was a time and season for all communications, and that the best and truest counsel may, unwisely given, work all the harm it is intended to avert.

The great turn to my thoughts was not given by Mr. Bowden or his daughter; not by Upton Woodleigh, whom I met sometimes in Mr. Bowden's chapel, at Mr. Bowden's table, and who was always there by the "merest accident in the world;" not by his sister Caroline, or Constance, whose smiles were back again, and whose heart was full of happiness; not by Stephen Markingham; not by any who had ever offered me advice.

"There is a friend of yours waiting to see you in the next room," said Mr. Bowden to me as I entered his house late one evening.

"A friend of mine! may I ask his name?"

"He called yesterday for your address, but upon hearing that you intended to visit me this evening, he proposed to meet you here."

"Who is he?" I asked impatiently.

"One whom I had a strong objection to see your friend once; one who has improved very much, thanks to that which tests the true nature of most men—misfortune; his name is Arrow."

"Tom!" I exclaimed, rushing from my step-father's presence.

When I was in the hall I walked more slowly towards the room wherein an old friend was waiting for me—he from whom I had parted with signs of true friendship, and yet never sought to find again. I entered the room with a burning cheek, and Tom Arrow, half inclined to cry and look stern, half inclined to laugh and dash at me, rose from his seat facing Miss Bowden, and said hoarsely:—

"Well, Bob, how are you?"

"Better than I deserve to be for neglecting an old comrade," I replied, shaking him heartily by the hand.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Bob," said Tom; "and I can't help being glad to see you, though I thought I shouldn't. Don't go, Miss Bowden; I'm not going to cry—upon my soul I ain't!"

But Miss Bowden, murmuring something about "old friends' confessions," was already at the door.

"She's a nice girl," said Tom, in an ecstasy, when she had quitted the room; "what I call a sensible, practical young lady. If I had not been engaged to the dearest little creature on the face of the earth, she would have done for me—clean!"

"Engaged, eh, Tom!"

"Yes, to be married—Jenny's her name—in exactly eight years' time, come next Sunday, but I'll tell you all about her presently. So you are really glad to see me, Bob?"

"It gives me a pleasure that I have not felt for many a day."

"And yet you did not know whether I was alive or dead—and didn't care!" said Tom, reproachfully.

"I have been a fool and an idiot the last three years, Tom—have neglected all my best friends, and studied new and false ones."

"Well, that is complimentary, at any rate—a fool and an idiot. What a remarkable coincidence!—so have I."

I could not help laughing at Tom Arrow's grave countenance.

"That is, until I met with Jenny," added Tom, "one of my old pal's sisters she is.—I'll tell you about her presently. I have been giving Mr. Bowden a little sketch of my life—has he told you?"

"He left that revelation for my friend."

"Then, Bob, I'll make it clear in a very few words. After you left England I went on in the old style—gay, rollicking, lazy style, wasn't it Bob?—came into possession of all my money—what was left of it!—spent it at billiards, in giving evening parties, and going to races; lent it to my friends, flung it at people, pitched it to the right, tossed it to the left, till it was all gone but fifty-two pounds, nine and sixpence! I was thinking of the neatest way to pitch that after the rest, when I met with a serious friend,—only think, a serious friend!—who attends Mr. Bowden's chapel and is a regular Methodistical medical student, the only one at Guy's! And," with a chuckle, "he's got a sister, Bob, and—I'll tell you more about her presently."

"And did this moral medical student tell you that it was time to sow your wild oats, Tom?"

"Yes, he took me home to his house and talked to me ; so did his sister—did I tell you her name was Jenny ? "

"Yes."

"And we went to hear Mr. Bowden preach, and he gave me the horrors till I thought of the stone-china shepherdess ; then I burst out laughing and disgusted the congregation. However, I took to studying in earnest, and Watts—that's my Jenny's brother—and I passed our examinations and became M.R.C.S.'s last week, my boy."

"My dear Tom, I congratulate you."

"Don't be in a hurry. My father came to town yesterday and swore he'd cut me off with a shilling, and that I shouldn't marry Jenny, and that I had been a fool all my life, on which last point I perfectly agreed with him. We got over our quarrel at last, and he forgave me like a brick of a father as he is, and paid my passage-money into the bargain."

"Passage-money—what do you mean ? "

"Didn't I tell you that I was going to Australia in that fast-sailing ship, the Phoenix ?—and that I am going to stop in the new land till I have made money enough to come back to England and marry Jenny ?—I'm going to tell you all about her presently ! I shall make a fortune in eight years, you know."

"If you have turned over a new leaf, there's a chance of it."

"In eight years there is a chance, I believe you. And Jenny will wait that time for me ; she has solemnly promised it, Bob ! "

"When do you start for Australia ? "

"Next month."

"Alone ? "

"Yes, all alone in my glory."

"Tom Arrow, I'll go with you ! " I cried. "I have had enough of the old world, I'll try my luck in the new ! "

"You don't mean that ! "

"I do indeed."

"That will be glorious, Bob ; what games—but," suddenly becoming grave, "have you turned over a new leaf, too ? "

"Yes."

"Oh ! that's all right, then," said he, "and two can make their fortunes as well as one, any day in the week. But what will Mr. Markingham, your cousins, Mr. Bowden say ? "

"Nothing that will alter my determination."

"Well, you were always quick enough in making up your

mind, so I'll hope for the best; and now—I'll tell you all about my Jenny!"

He was still talking of Jenny when Mr. Bowden and his daughter made their reappearance. I did not speak of my intentions that night; I kept my resolution to myself and brooded over it. Every day that followed strengthened me in my resolve; there was a wild daring in the scheme which pleased me. To leave all of them, to go forth to the new world with a heart full of courage, to shake off the load of dependence which I had long slavishly borne, and see if my own hands, my own brain, could not work out a future! I felt lighter beneath the new thoughts, and though there were one or two pangs at my heart when I remembered my friends, yet they did not weaken my purpose.

Those friends I told at last. Mr. Markingham, who had been the first to offer me the helping hand and share his fortune with me, was the first to hear my secret; it was his right. I can see now the look of surprise and the shade which passed over the keen-looking face.

"Well, if it must be, Woodleigh, so be it," he said; "I did not think you would have so soon tired of the philosopher."

"Not tired of *you*, Sir," replied I, earnestly, "but of my own inactive life, which is unsuited for me, adds to my discontent, weakens my mind, makes me morbid, childish, weak. I see the world before me; I see the workers on it are the happiest men and wear the brightest looks, and I know my duty is amongst them, working too. I never cared for riches or display; I would rather be my Cousin Upton than the son of a lord with twenty thousand a year now! I want to see if my own exertions cannot win me honour and wealth."

"This is a great change, Robert; what has brought it about?"

"Much that has happened lately, but more that is mysterious. I know, at least, that I have been miserable, felt like a slave since your money has been lavished upon me—that that money has made me false friends, and made me an enemy to myself."

"I can believe it, and yet——"

"And yet you must not think me ungrateful for all your past kindness, think I shall not ever remember and honour you. Oh! Sir, I know that you will be happier without me—what good have I ever done, what companion have I ever been, that you, by so much as a word, should say to me, 'Stay?'"

"I am getting on for fifty years of age ; at fifty a man does not easily form new ties, or give up without regret the old."

"You will form new and holier ties, Sir," said I ; "you were not made for the life that is lonely, or the hearth that is desolate."

"Well, well, you have acted for the best—you will come back one day a new man, I feel it—know it. Woodleigh, old friend, brother, son—what is it?—I will not say 'Stay,' but, 'God speed you !' "

I told my story to Mr. Bowden and his daughter ; told them of the sudden pride which had sprung up in my breast, and which turned from the gifts of my patron ; told them of my desire for a new life, a purpose, a something to look forward to and struggle for, and they understood me, and said also "God speed me !"

With the same story I went to Grove House, Paddington, one night in February, little thinking of a story following close on mine, a darker, sadder one. I made my confession in the old familiar drawing-room where I had sat so often, had such unprofitable thoughts, been always treated as a friend and equal. They were all round me that night ; even Johnny was there, a big bold-looking youth, who stood at my side with eyes and mouth wide open, a picture of wonder.

They were all there ; Aunt Woodleigh, in her easy-chair before the fire, her daughter Constance, to be married soon to Mr. Heberdeen, Mary, all wonder like her brother Johnny, Upton, an attentive listener, with his earnest eyes fixed on my face, and Caroline, the calmest, gravest, most unmoved.

As I told my story, I looked more than once towards Caroline. I could not understand that immobility of visage. I thought that she, of all of them—she who had listened to the last words of my mother, and had through life shown her interest in that mother's son—would have been most interested in my going, and have been the first to encourage me in my undertaking. I was pained, for it was only Caroline who remained silent and expressed no regret at parting, no wishes for my welfare.

Words of hope and encouragement which fell from the rest of my cousins, and Aunt Woodleigh, did not stir my heart much, or draw from me many thanks ; even Constance's best wishes fell on arid soil.

Aunt Woodleigh, one of the worst of observers, was the first that night to detect, or at least to allude to, the studied silence of her eldest child.

"Caroline, my dear, have you nothing to say concerning your cousin's departure?"

"Nothing," she answered, briefly.

"Dear me! I should have thought that you would have had a great deal to say."

"You have all forestalled me," was the answer. "Robert has received words of advice, hope, and encouragement—it is useless to repeat them."

"Have I acted wisely in giving up Mr. Markingham, Caroline?" I asked; "or is it another of my follies to shrink from the hand of the patron and go forth alone?"

"Change seems the best thing for you," said she, coldly; "you are fond of new scenes, new faces, and the memory of the old will not trouble your heart much. It is the easiest thing in the world to forget!"

"It will not be an easy task for me—I shall not attempt it."

"Time will assist you without an effort of your own."

Caroline's coldness, even indifference, to my future appeared to surprise others beside myself. Constance was perplexed, and Upton kept looking at Caroline out of the corners of his eyes in a very inquisitive manner.

Upton Woodleigh, who, at home or abroad, had always business floating in his clever little head, changed the conversation by inquiring:—

"If I would undertake a commission for him to Australia?"

"A hundred, if you wish, Upton."

"I have great faith in Australia," said Upton: "every belief that it will rank second to none in the history of nations. Who can dream what a land like Australia may become fifty years hence; what the hand and the brain of the Saxon may achieve for it in the time that is coming?"

"And what help Robert Woodleigh may afford to its progress," said Constance, smiling.

"To be sure, Constance," said Upton; "lay the foundation of another Woodleigh business at the Antipodes. I should think contracting and carrying the finest trade in the world there. Robert knows something about it, and if he feels inclined to start a business in the name of 'Woodleigh Cousins,' we'll begin a small firm on the strength of it. What say you, partner?"

"That you have too much confidence in me, Upton—that there is more of my impulsive nature than of your own sober sense in the proposal."

"It isn't the first time that I have thought of Australia," said Upton, "and wished for a managing man there. Still, we will not decide anything to-night—there wouldn't be a great deal of sense in that, perhaps. You must write home to us, Robert, and give us your opinion of the place before we begin a game at speculation on the other side of the globe. However, that need not prevent me proving to you, Robert, that I *have* thought of Australia, and of a plan of business that would stand a fair chance of success there. Come to my study for a moment, and I'll bother you a little with calculations."

"Not bother me—I am a man of business now, remember!"

"The Woodleighs were always capital fellows for business," affirmed Upton, as we made our excuses to the ladies and adjourned to the study.

In that study, on my last night under the roof of Grove House, I found matter for surprise and admiration. I found in the youth of Upton all the caution and foresight of middle age, the mind to embrace great schemes in the money world, with that prudence which alone makes great schemes successful. Every man has his hobby; Upton's was business. His heart and soul were in that, as other men's are in pleasures, books, and sciences. And yet no man, old or young, in business or out of it, had a larger heart, or was full of more generous sentiments.

Upton had indeed thought of starting a business in Australia, similar to his own in England. Paper after paper, column after column of statistics he piled before me, with a profusion, and dilated upon with an eloquence, that perfectly bewildered me, and he was still expounding, arguing, convincing, when a servant-maid entered the room and announced that a gentleman desired a private interview with him.

"Show him up," said Upton.

"Shall I return to the drawing-room?" I said, rising.

"No, no," replied Upton, quickly, "keep your seat. I have no state secrets to hide from my friends; I always distrust people who want private interviews—they have generally something to sell, or they want money, or an order for advertisements, or——"

He stopped and changed colour as the door opened and the servant announced:—

"Mr. Melville."

Mr. Melville was a middle-aged man, sharp-featured, and of short stature, with "matter of fact" stamped on his counte-

nance—certainly not a man to be afraid of or change colour at.

"Pray take a chair," said Upton, rather nervously, "I did not anticipate the pleasure of a call this evening. Is—is anything wrong?"

"For my own credit, for the credit of my employer, I sincerely hope not."

Mr. Melville took the chair by the side of the library-table, and glanced towards me.

"My cousin, Mr. Woodleigh," said Upton, more in explanation than introduction.

Mr. Melville, with a half-bow in my direction, looked at Upton, coughed and fidgeted.

"There is no occasion for Mr. Woodleigh's withdrawal," said Upton. "Robert, I beg you will not retire, I have more to say to you."

Mr. Melville drew forth a pocket-book, unclasped it, or rather unlocked it, fumbled amidst a mass of papers, and finally produced three bankers' cheques, which he tendered with a trembling hand to Upton.

"Those cheques were presented at our bank this afternoon; I, head clerk to Messrs. Wilkins, Waters, Edmonds and Co., received them, cashed them. Being a large demand on your balance, I examined them with particular care, but saw nothing to suspect. When the bank closed, I re-examined them, placed them before Mr. Edmonds, who, although believing them correct also, yet still thought it would be the most judicious course to deviate from the usual routine, and call here in case of accident."

Upton took the cheques and glanced at them. He was deathly white, and yet so firm and unmoved that the suspicions which were stealing on me were arrested by his composure. The hand that held the cheques shook not as he returned them to Mr. Melville.

"These will come to me in the usual course, Mr. Melville," said he; "they—they are quite—correct!"

Mr. Melville, evidently relieved by this statement, rose at once.

"It affords me great pleasure to hear it, Mr. Woodleigh," said he; "for although the signatures are perfect, yet, in these times, we cannot be too careful."

"Not too careful—no," said Upton, absently.

"I trust you will allow that carefulness to plead my excuse for intruding on you, Mr. Woodleigh?"

"No excuse is necessary," answered Upton; "I am obliged by your visit. It might have been of inestimable service had those cheques been—forgeries."

Mr. Melville retired. Upton politely saw him to the door, returned and sat down before me with a still more ghastly face.

"We were talking of Australia," he said—"of the profits to be derived from my—my plan of—how my head swims!"

"My dear Upton, you are ill!"

"No, Robert, not ill," he said, clutching my arm—"a swimming in my head; I am subject to it! I shall be better in a minute."

He released my arm and said faintly :—

"A glass of water, Robert. Will you ring, please?"

My hand was on the bell, when he exclaimed :—

"No, no—you will find water in my dressing-room, the first room on your right—don't ring, for God's sake!"

I took a wax candle from the desk, crossed the landing hurriedly, passed into the dressing-room, poured out a glass of water, came out again and met Caroline Woodleigh face to face.

"Robert!" she exclaimed, "what's the matter? where is Upton?"

"In his study; he is a little faint, that's all."

Before I could stop her, she had flown into the study—was bending over him and looking with a painful earnestness into his face.

"Oh! Upton, dear brother Upton, what has happened? Is there more trouble in store for us? You will tell me, I am sure."

He did not answer; his eyes closed, and his head fell forward on his chest. There was no exclamation from Caroline; her self-possession suddenly returned, and though her face was as pale as her brother's, she was full of courage, prudence. Her quick hands unfastened his neck-tie, snatched the water from me, and dashed it in his face.

"Who has been here?" she said.

I hesitated.

"Who has been here?" she demanded, more peremptorily; "is it I who am to be kept in the dark, to be in my ignorance the cause of evil? Robert, I *will* be answered!"

"Mr. Melville has been here."

"Who is he?" she said, impatiently.

"The head clerk to Upton's bankers. He brought some cheques for Upton to inspect."

"And Upton——"

"Says they are correct—that there is no mistake."

"Poor Upton!" murmured Caroline, as she bent over her brother and pressed her lips to his forehead.

"Caroline!" I exclaimed, "do you think—fear——"

"The worst," she answered, mournfully.

Upton breathed more freely, but there was a wild look in his eyes as he raised his head and looked round him.

"Where's Dick?—tell him that——"

The wild look vanished as he met the gaze of his sister, and felt her hand steal into his own. He laid his head upon her bosom, saying :—

"Ah! Caroline, are you here? I may want a faithful friend like you to comfort me soon!"

"No, no, dear—I hope not."

"I can guess now, Carry, the secret of my father's will—it is all as plain as noonday! But why was that secret kept from me, when the knowledge of it might have saved me from ruin?"

"Not ruin, Upton."

"God knows!" was the solemn answer.

"I will tell you why our father was silent concerning an act of treachery akin to that which has occurred to-night," said Caroline, vehemently; "because your brother Richard craved pardon on his knees, called his Maker to witness his repentance, swore that no temptation should lead him into crime again, and prayed for the silence of the grave over his unworthy act."

"And father——?"

"Believed him—promised, for the honour of the family, that silence which he begged."

"But you?"

"At the first discovery of his son's guilt, my father, in the fulness of his grief, sought me out and asked my counsel in his trouble. I knew the secret from the first. I was a witness to my brother's feigned repentance."

"And deceived by it?"

"Yes. I was his sister, and could not believe him wholly bad," she answered; "I promised him my silence, and have kept it till this night—not without fears and grave misgivings."

"And yet I was not warned," said Upton, reproachfully.

"Upton," said Caroline, "to our father, on his dying bed, I renewed the promise made to Richard, and I could not break it without sufficient cause. With all my doubts, there was no proof of the blackness of his heart or sign of the baseness which it harboured. He came in the midst of us; he was my mother's hope; he took his place by her side, and was the loving son and brother to the last!"

"God forgive that brother, whom I shall never see again, never touch his hand or look into his face! He has gone from us, guilty and disgraced; he is to all of us from this time—dead!"

He dashed his hand across his eyes a moment, then said:—

"For his poor mother's sake, let him go upon his way—that mother who must not know a word of this, who must think that he has gone abroad, is coming back some day, is still her frank, honest, faithful child. I take the loss upon myself; and as it is not all my fortune he has robbed me of, I will not call it ruin, Carry."

"Ruin and Upton Woodleigh's name will never be connected," said his sister, more cheerfully; "energy, honesty, and perseverance go not the down-hill road—there is a law in heaven against it."

"Ah! my warm-hearted sister, faithful friend, wise counsellor, I shall never lack encouragement whilst you are by my side—you make up for my loss."

"And that in time will——"

"Hush! I am not thinking of my money—but of my brother!"

Upton's generous mind could even find excuses for that brother's guilt—it was natural for him to look to the bright side and soften down the dark.

"Perhaps he took it as his birthright, Carry," he said, "thought two hundred a-year almost a beggar's pittance. Well, it wasn't much, and if poor father had entirely forgiven him, what a different life his might have been!"

"No," said his sister; "his father acted wisely. Two thousand a-year, instead of two hundred, would have made him more reckless and profligate, not have changed his nature—with the lesser sum there was a chance of his becoming industrious and putting those talents which he possessed to that use which the Great Giver intended."

Caroline turned to me.

"Robert, you have been witness to a painful scene, and have become possessed of a more painful secret. We can trust you?"

"Yes."

"So let the story end, then," said Upton; "it is a sad one for human nature, there is no reason to repeat it. Part of it will ever remain a mystery to me."

"What part is that?" asked his sister.

"My signature to the cheques—a signature that would have deceived myself. In all my life I never wrote a letter to Richard signed anything but 'Upton,' and my business letters are written by my clerk."

"You signed your name in full, Upton, to a letter written some months ago to me—a letter which he saw and read—a letter which I lost."

"That may be the right answer to the riddle." He paused, then added quickly, "I said let the story end, and yet I dwell upon it still!"

"Before it is dismissed for ever, Upton," I said, "let me speak of an offer I desire to make."

"No," he answered; "I know what you would say. I cannot take your help, assistance, or balk you in the projects you have formed. Leave me to fight my way alone—it is better for me; there will be many friends to help me, if I need them."

I did not press him; "I knew Upton's word was never changed. We went down stairs, resumed our place at the fireside, talked once more of my travels, my prospects and intentions. Aunt Woodleigh, in her happy ignorance, had only consideration for me that night, only concern for my dangers and temptations, and, for the few remaining hours of my stay, Upton's strong mind shook off those dark impressions which were to rest upon it for many a future day.

The time passed on, the hour grew late, and still I lingered. It was my last night in Grove House; I might never see any of them again; old scenes, friends, hopes, were to be all parted with, to fade away dream-like, and leave me desolate!

There is an end to all things, and the end came. Amidst all the pain of parting, it was pleasant to know that I—ill-mannered, foolish, reckless being as I had ever proved myself—should be missed, that there were tears in the eyes of my friends, and sorrow in their looks,—in all but Caroline's, whose

coldness seemed to increase as the minutes sped away, who said "Good-bye" with an averted head, and was the only one of all my friends who did not see me to the threshold of Grove House.

Standing on that threshold, my aunt and cousins near me, I missed the face of Caroline. I thought, before I vanished for ever, she might have said "good-bye" again, and I bit my quivering lip to keep it from betraying me. I clasped Upton's hand again, kissed my aunt and cousins, I hastened away, then paused,—came back!

"I cannot go away in doubt," I said. "I must see Caroline once more. I fear that I have offended her."

Leaving them in the hall awaiting my return, I hurried back into the drawing-room. At the open door I paused again—she was kneeling by her mother's chair as if in prayer—she was looking upwards as to heaven! Could I disturb her then—at such a time—suffering from the trouble that had fallen on her house? Her eyes were full of tears, her clasped hands trembling, and her voice was low and stifling. It was a sorrow that I dared not trespass on, and I made one backward step, when my own name, thrice repeated in a strange abandonment of grief, arrested me.

In a moment the mystery of a life, the story of one faithful heart, flashed on me; I knew all then, the mists were vanishing, the dazzling, happy truth was shining in upon me.

Another moment, and I was at her side, and she had started to her feet, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing, her hand pointing to the door.

"Go, Sir, go—nor speak a single word! You have chosen your path, follow it, it may lead unto your happiness. What you have heard just now, believe to be an idle dream. I beg of you to leave me!"

"No, Caroline, not leave you yet. I came back to say good-bye again; I came to ask why, in the last moments of a parting for long years, you were more cold and distant than the rest. I return to find you weeping, praying as only one has ever prayed for me, and my heart is full of hope. Oh, Caroline, dear cousin, don't drive that hope away!"

"It is the madness of a moment—you would have gone away and——"

"And have thought of you all my life," I interrupted, "thought of you as an angel far above my reach. Caroline, you must not strive to snatch away this hand until I tell you

that there is no happiness for me unless you give me hope to win you for a wife. That hope will spur me on in the new world, nerve me in my labours, gladden every task, and make no barrier insurmountable."

"The folly of a moment, Robert—the old impulsive nature. Oh! leave me now, for ever, and do not wring my heart thus. It is a coward's act to take advantage of my weakness."

"It is a lover's act to seek the promise which may one day make him happy!"

"I cannot promise," she said, mournfully; "my duty is by my mother's side, my ruined brother's. And I cannot yet believe—you must pardon me, Robert, but it is a bitter truth—in a passion the very wildness of which is its surest sign of evanescence."

"Give me then your word that you will not be another's or hear love from another's lips for two short years at least; grant me those two years in Australia, say that at their expiration you will give me hope if I still think of you, am working for you, and I will go away content!"

"Why wish to afford me another proof of your inconstant nature?"

"Then I go away despairing, and that recklessness which has ever been my curse comes back!"

"Stay!—I—I—give that word if it will make you happy, Robert."

"And if I remind you of it in the future, and claim the promise which it holds out, Carry?"

She turned away her blushing face and answered:—

"You will not be then the only happy one!"

For one brief moment my arms were round her, her swimming eyes were looking into mine, my lips were on her cheek, and then I tore myself away, dashed into the hall, passed my aunt and cousins with strange unmeaning gestures and was gone!

CHAPTER VII.

"WHICH ENDETH ALL
IN RECONCILEMENT."

THERE is but little more to say. The history of my travels, trials, struggles in Australia is not for this book, has nothing with this book in common. Is it not enough to say that I kept my word to Caroline—wiser to end my story thus than weary the reader who has kindly followed in my steps by prating of my profits, losses, cash in hand, and balance at my banker's? Yes; but ere the story end, there are one or two figures flitting by which I would fain arrest, fain believe—idle dreamer that I am—the reader would know more about.

Believing that, I look towards them in the year of 1859, look across the sea from my Australian home, gladdened by a loving English wife. Peace, rest, and happiness seem to have fallen on old friends. My step-father lives, preaches, and is honoured by his flock; his daughter still sends forth silently, namelessly, her creations to the world. She is happy, and writes me word that she don't think she shall ever marry now; for she is long past thirty.

And Upton? He did not give way beneath his loss—he only redoubled his exertions and built his fortunes firmer. He is still a business man, lives at present at Grove House with his mother, and is the only cousin of mine unmarried; for Johnny, at the ripe age of twenty-three, is a Benedict, and the "father of"—to quote Aunt Woodleigh—"such a baby!"

If Upton should ever marry Miss Bowden—sometimes I think he will—Aunt Woodleigh will make the best of mothers-in-law—not being a strong-minded woman.

The figures flit by rapidly; Constance and Heberdeen—Tom Arrow and his wife—their homes are in the sunshine; may the shadows never darken them!

Another couple ere we close the book—the husband many years older than the wife, but both full of such trust and confidence in one another that many couples, better matched in years, might take them for a pattern. Generous, great-hearted, deep-thinking Stephen Markingham—his happiness came late in life, it will last, God willing, to the end. He has given up

many of his pet theories, abandoned his peculiar ideas upon religion, and don't even smoke his great meerschaum so often. Much of his philosophy, all his Atheism, and that "horrid habit of smoking!" have been abandoned at Harriet Markingham's desire, and satirists shrug their shoulders and say, "hen-pecked!" Perhaps so, but what pleasant hen-pecking it must be to make such a fine old English gentleman of the philosopher!

And Richard Woodleigh, the only "black sheep" of this story—what of him? Poetical justice demands a victim—it is the villain of the tale who, at the end, sinks down the trap discomfited. And yet I can say little of him. He has gone, and left no trace. Rich or poor, we know enough of human nature to believe that he is not happy—the robber and the schemer never are. We may meet them in their purple and fine linen; they may fare sumptuously and sit at great men's tables; they may go on falsely smiling to the end; but the sword is always hanging by a hair, and fear, suspicion and remorse lurk for ever in the darkness.

From the darkness, let me turn to the brightness of my present life—the shadows vanish, and the light steals over all. I look into the face of a dear wife bending over my shoulder as I write, I hear a little voice say "Father" at my side, and I envy no man's lot!

THE END.

SELECT LIBRARY OF FICTION, 2/- PER VOLUME.

ONE OF THEM.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

"The novels of Charles Lever, republished in a cheap form, must prove most acceptable to a very large portion of the readers of works of fiction. There is no modern writer who has thrown so much of genial mirth, such native humour, such a collection of humorous incidents, into his stories. There is a raciness in its humour that we look for in vain in the crowd of novel writers of the present day; and, combined with this native humour and ready wit there are so many life-like sketches of character, so many touches of a master's hand, that one does not so much read of, as speak to, and with the leading characters to whom the reader is introduced. The very mention of the name of Charles Lever calls up a crowd of old associations and acquaintances; the rollicking Harry Lorrequer, the dashing Knight of Gwynne, the carefully drawn O'Donoghue, carrying us back to the Ireland of half a century since; and those curious, but yet real and life-like members of the Dodd family, and others, which have established for themselves an undying reputation in the world of light literature."—*Observer*.

THE WHITEBOY.

A STORY OF IRELAND.

BY MRS. S. C. HALL.

"Full of vivid descriptions, life-like sketches of character, dashes of genuine Irish humour, with occasionally scenes exhibiting the strong passions and affections of the Irish people, drawn with exceeding energy and power."—*Atlas*.

"Indisputably Mrs. Hall's best novel."
—*Athenæum*.

DOCTOR THORNE.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

"The fact that this is the tenth edition of this popular and delightful story is a proof of the favourable reception that it has met with amongst the novel-reading public. We are not surprised at it, for there is a great charm in the manly honesty, the perseverance, the indifference to professional etiquette, and above all, in the affection of the doctor for his niece Mary Thorne, which must make him a favourite with every reader. Then Mary Thorne is a heroine of the right stamp, courted and beloved, in spite of all aristocratic surrounding influences, by young Gresham, of Greshamsbury, and in spite of the doubt that hangs about her parentage. The two young people are models of faithfulness, and in the end everything comes right as it should come. With a hero so well known as Dr. Thorne, it is unnecessary that we should do more than introduce him to his proper audience, and then make our bow."—*Western Daily Mercury*.

ROLAND CASHEL.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

Two Vols.

"Mr. Lever is the prince of 'Neck-or-Nothing' novelists! We used to think that for intrepidity in clearing the hedges and ditches—the boundaries and gaps—of a story, there was no one like poor Captain Marryat; but, of the two, Mr. Lever has the easier seat, and the more adroit bridle-hand. Little can those who have run through the numbers of 'Roland Cashel' before us, divine what manner of headlong leaps and frantic gallops they may be compelled to take, ere they come in at the 'death' of the plot, and (let us hope) the marriage of the hero."—*Athenæum*.

SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS AND AT RAILWAY STATIONS.

DAVENPORT DUNN:

A MAN OF OUR DAY.

BY CHARLES LEVER.

Two Vols.

"That Davenport Dunn is the best of Mr. Lever's novels we do not affirm; but we have no reluctance in owning that we like it the best. It professes to narrate the career of a brilliant swindler, a man who, from an obscure origin, becomes by his daring genius for speculation a millionaire, the friend of cabinet ministers, and the associate of the highest nobility. He establishes banks, railways, dock, and mining companies, &c., &c., governing the whole on the most gigantic scale by that ingenious system—credit. The collapse comes in time, just as it did in the case of John Sadleir, whose career Mr. Lever had probably in his mind's eye when he sketched the character of Davenport Dunn. The book is brim full of plot and intrigue, and the interest never flags from beginning to end."—*Eddowes' Shrewsbury Journal*.

CASTLE RICHMOND

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

"A novel, by the author of 'Doctor Thorne,' is certain to yield a good deal of amusement to all novel readers of both sexes, who have the necessary amount of culture and knowledge of the world to bring to the reading of them. 'Castle Richmond' is a clever book; full of acute and accurate observations of men and manners in the south of Ireland, besides containing a good story concerning people worth telling stories about."—*The Globe*.

THE BERTRAMS.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

"The Bertrams' are two brothers and a son of the younger. The latter, the hero of the story, is as agreeable a hero as any we have met for some time, being neither of the morbid nor of the 'muscular Christian' kind. The elder Bertram is a miser who has amassed half a million of money. He is hard, shrewd, and cynical, but not without affection for his nephew, whom he describes contemptuously, but with some truth, as having "a good heart and," in spite of a double-first, a "bad head." The hero's father is one of the best drawn characters in the book. On the whole, we cannot say more of 'The Bertrams' than that it is one of the best novels of the season."—*Daily News*.

WILDFLOWER.

By the Author of "Woman's Ransom,"
"Mr. Stewart's Intentions," &c.

"A book which when taken in hand will not be willingly laid down by any novel reader till he has ended it."—*Athenæum*.

"One of the best novels it has lately been our fortune to meet with. The plot is ingenious and novel, and the characters are sketched with a masterly hand."—*Pref.*

"A novel that will not be easily surpassed. Its execution is admirable, every way. The incidents are ever varying, very attractive, and interesting. The author, in power of invention and narration, need fear no competitor."—*Observer*.

"One of the best novels of the season. It is difficult to lay it down after having once commenced the perusal."—*Daily News*.

SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS AND AT RAILWAY STATIONS.

Just Published, crown 8vo, cloth, price 6s.

THE BELTON ESTATE. By Anthony Trollope.

Anthony Trollope's CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?

Forty Illustrations by "Phiz," &c. &c. In 1 Vol., 8vo, cloth.

Cheaper Edition, in One Volume. Forty Illustrations by
J. E. Millais.

ORLEY FARM. By Anthony Trollope.

Cheaper Edition, price 6s., cloth, Illustrated.

MISS MACKENZIE. By Anthony Trollope.

"It is the union of fertility, readability, and consummate cleverness, which makes us in gaping wonderment abound when we take up 'Miss Mackenzie.' On careful perusal we find it excellent; in Mr. Trollope's quietest tone of humour."—*Globe*.

Fifth and Cheaper Edition, in one Vol., post 8vo, cloth, price 6s.

Mr. Anthony Trollope's NORTH AMERICA.

Sixth Edition, post 8vo, cloth, 5s.

**The WEST INDIES and the SPANISH MAIN.
By Anthony Trollope.**

CONTENTS:—Jamaica.—Black Men. Jamaica.—White Men. Jamaica.—Coloured Men. Jamaica.—Government. Jamaica.—Town. Jamaica.—Country. Jamaica.—Sugar. Trinidad. Barbadoes. Isthmus of Panama, &c., &c., &c.

"If by means of Mr. Trollope's pleasant pages attention is turned to these islands, and some encouragement is afforded to our planters, the author may regard his book of travels as the most useful if not the most brilliant volume which he has yet published."—*The Times*.

New Edition, with 12 Illustrations by "Phiz," price 1s.

ST. PATRICK'S EVE. By Charles Lever.

New and Cheaper Edition, post 8vo, cloth, 7s. 6d., with 26 Steel
Illustrations by "Phiz."

PAVED WITH GOLD. By Augustus Mayhew.

"A romance and reality of the London streets; an unfashionable novel."

London: **CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, Piccadilly.**

